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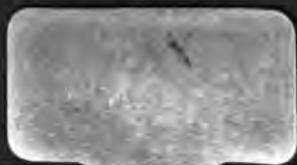
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RUTH MAXWELL.

VOL. I.



# RUTH MAXWELL.

BY

LADY BLAKE,

AUTHOR OF

“CLAUDE,” “HELEN’S FIRST LOVE,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# RUTH MAXWELL.

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## CHAPTER I.

**I**T was Ruth Maxwell's birthday, and she was five-and-twenty. It was a day she had been looking forward to for some time past, for on its arrival she was to come into possession of a house of her own, and a good fortune; at least it seemed riches to her, for up to that time she had been very poor, and entirely dependent on her step-mother. It was two years since she had known of the pleasant things in prospect for her, should she live to attain the age of twenty-five. She had been aware, also, that,

should she chance to die the very day before her birthday, her expected possessions would all go to the man who held them in trust for her, and who was himself the recipient of the other moiety of her aunt's property. Though the word "moiety" has been used, it is not to be supposed that Ruth Maxwell, Mrs. Penrose's niece, expected to be placed in the same position, in regard to worldly goods, as Mr. John Penrose, the nephew of Mr. Penrose, the wealthy brewer of Castleford.

The family of Penrose had been well known in that ancient town for the last century or so, as bankers and brewers, especially in the latter department, where the fame of the old establishment had long been recognized, and had extended far beyond its own immediate locality. It was to the late head of this large business that Ruth Max-

well was indebted for the bequest which came to her more immediately from her own aunt, who had, late in life, married the wealthy brewer, Mr. Penrose. They had no children of their own, and were both long past their first youth when this marriage took place.

They lived, however, for some years together in perfect harmony and apparent comfort, believing, no doubt, that they had enjoyed as much felicity as falls to the lot of married mortals in general.

Mr. Penrose was the first to quit this mortal scene, and leave all the treasures he had heaped up in the course of a long life. He died as he had lived, with much composure, leaving his property to his nephew, charged with a handsome annuity to his wife, which at her death was to go half to her own niece and half to his own nephew.

There were endless conditions and restrictions annexed to Ruth's share of the inheritance, and the will itself was a miracle of legal intricacy, the reading of which in full was calculated to soften the brain of anyone who was not born as well as bred a lawyer.

The fortunate heir, John Penrose, although an able man of business himself, was fain to be thankful for an abstract of the lengthy document, which his considerate solicitor placed in his hands, saying, as he pointed to the original last will and testament of the late Mr. Penrose,

"Nothing less would satisfy your good uncle. It has been the work of years; but I think an hour or two of patient consideration first of this little abstract will enable you to encounter this *pièce de resistance* at your leisure."

Ruth knew but little of the relations to whom she was so greatly indebted. It was ten years since she had seen either, and then she went to spend a month with her father's only sister and her husband, Mr. Penrose. She remembered seeing his nephew, who was at that time an inmate of their house, and about twenty, whilst she was a shy, tall, unformed girl of fifteen.

When Ruth tried to recall this nephew to her recollection, it seemed he had made but little mark in her memory. He had evidently taken but scant notice of her at that time. Still, if she failed in her endeavours to recall anything to his advantage, she could not remember that in any way he had given her cause for dislike. She had a vague impression that whenever he was called upon to do anything for her as the young lady visitor, he performed his task

quietly and kindly, or perhaps it had better be called "civilly."

Ruth was rather anxious to recall her impressions concerning this gentleman, as she found her future prospects were much bound up in his—that is, he had a good deal of power left in his hands regarding Miss Maxwell's half of the property left by her aunt, and on any violation of the conditions, it would all revert to Mr. John Penrose himself. It was rather a mortifying position for a young woman like Ruth, who was by nature independent and energetic. Still it was so great a blessing to have anything of a competence in prospect, that she felt it would be ungrateful to quarrel with the conditions by which she found herself bound.

Ruth was entitled by her aunt's will, not only to the eight hundred a year which

fell to her share, but also to the pleasant house the old couple had always lived in, with such plate and furniture as had been in her aunt's possession from the time of her husband's death. To this house was also attached a garden and small paddock, which became Ruth's property at the stipulated time.

It would be tedious to enumerate all the clauses annexed to this possession also, but the principal ones were, that she should enter immediately into occupation of the said tenement, and live there herself, on pain of forfeiture, as she could neither sell the place nor let it, nor even lend it, nor leave it for more than a few months, unless with the acquiescence of the above John Penrose, to whom it would lapse by reason of any failure on the part of the said Ruth Maxwell in these conditions. These several

clauses and restrictions had often been discussed by Ruth and her step-mother, Mrs. Maxwell. It was the day before Ruth's birthday that Mrs. Maxwell said quietly, more, perhaps, in way of thinking aloud than designed for her companion's ear—

“I daresay they intended that you and Mr. John Penrose should marry some day.”

Ruth heard and looked up quickly, whilst a slight flush came into her usually pale face. She answered gently,

“I do not think they were match-making people, mother; and certainly it would be a bad way to attain such an end—I mean the placing Mr. Penrose in such supreme authority over me. But,” she added with a smile, and checking herself, “I daresay they meant kindly and well—no doubt thinking that property of any kind is so new to me that I ought not to have un-



limited control over it, even at the advanced age of five-and-twenty."

Ruth and her step-mother were on very happy terms. They were nearly alone in the world, and had lived together ever since the second marriage of her father, when she was a little child of five years old. She had grown up a graceful, pleasing-looking woman, with a tall, flexible figure, delicate but firmly-cut features, dark grey eyes, and soft brown hair, several shades lighter than her eyebrows and the long lashes which were nearly black.

It was an attractive face to those who were in the habit of studying it, and its changing expressions; but the want of colour in general prevented Ruth's attaining the distinction of being reckoned a beauty. Few people had ever thought of her as such, though it happened sometimes that those

who could discern and appreciate the rare symmetry of form and feature peculiar to Ruth, preferred it to any brilliancy of complexion displayed by others who might be more admired. Her step-mother had moved in a very different position of life before her second marriage, and, when young, had been reckoned a decided beauty. She was, in fact, one of the prettiest girls of her time, when she married her first husband, Mr. Beaumont, of Harewood Park, near Castleford, and was still more admired as his wife.

She had, however, descended from her high estate, and, at the time her step-daughter succeeded to her inheritance, she was a lonely widow with whom trial and trouble, even more than time, had done their work, and rendered poor Mrs. Maxwell the fragile, faded wreck of her former self she was then.

As she and Ruth sat and talked of her coming prosperity, the thought would intrude itself into the elder woman's heart, "And then, when Ruth is rich and independent, she will be sure to marry soon, and then—she will leave me—and I shall be alone in this cold world—quite alone!" It was this apprehension which caused the remark made relative to Mr. Penrose, in whom she fancied she already saw the future husband of her step-daughter. Not but that she would have tried to rejoice in any good that might have befallen Ruth, who had always been a loving child to her; still she looked forward with dread to the long, lonely, blank future that might be in store for her.

No one who could have read these thoughts would have imagined that Mrs. Maxwell had then, besides the children she had lost (a brother and sister of her step-

daughter's), two living children—that she was still the mother of a son and a daughter, both hopeful, living children of her first marriage. Such however was her relationship to Louis Beaumont, whose name was familiar throughout the county where he lived, who was a man of unblemished character, a perfect gentleman in manners and appearance, and the master of a large property and fine place. While his sister Maude, nearly ten years younger than himself, was as widely noted for her beauty and such accomplishments as would easily have eclipsed the less brilliant attractions of Ruth Maxwell, the surgeon's daughter. But neither Mr. Beaumont nor his sister knew anything of their mother as Mrs. Maxwell. It was even many years since the familiar name of mother had passed their lips. To the young man, who was now in his thirtieth year, the word

mother had become strange, and full of bitter associations and unpleasant memories. To the sister, so much younger, it signified little or nothing. Maude Beaumont was but three years old when her mother left her and married again, and being but a twelvemonth old when her father died, the recollection of ever having had parents faded almost entirely from her mind. From the day of that second marriage, which converted the rich and admired widow of Mr. Beaumont of Harewood into the poor and unnoticed wife of a second-rate medical man—from that day and hour Mrs. Maxwell had never seen, or had the power of seeing, the children of her first marriage. It was an old story; Mrs. Beaumont, in marrying again as she had done, had sacrificed everything, save honour, to her woman's love.

Her first marriage had been in every way highly approved of, both in her own family and by the world in general. It was considered most proper and suitable, and yet it had not been a very happy one.

There was nothing, however, very tangible to complain of. Mr. Beaumont was well matched in age and in position of life to the daughter of his neighbour, Sir Christopher Harding. After a few weeks' acquaintance, and subsequent love-making on Mr. Beaumont's part, he was successful in winning the affections of Amelia Harding, who forthwith became his wife. She was very young, and he was desperately in love, according to his capability of entertaining that sentiment. All Miss Harding's friends thought her a very fortunate girl when she married Mr. Beaumont, of Harewood Park,

with an income of fifteen or twenty thousand a year, and it never came into the head of the beautiful and happy young bride to think it could ever be otherwise with her.

By the end of the first year of her married life, Mrs. Beaumont began to suspect she had made a mistake, and that wealth and position were not everything in the world, and to apprehend that the husband with whom she shared the many advantages they commanded might be wanting in those qualities which are essential to the happiness of married life.

Mr. Beaumont had no great faults of character, and yet he was not a companionable person; and it was but too evident, ere long, that he did not desire to find a constant companion in his young wife. He made it apparent to her that, when they were not obliged to be together in society,

he preferred being alone. Her pursuits were not his, and he liked to go his own way unfettered and uncontrolled, as in his bachelor days; her constant presence was a *gêne*.

Mrs. Beaumont had not married merely on the strength of her husband's fortune and position in the county. She had entertained a girlish affection for the first man who had told her he loved her, and was altogether so unobjectionable in manner and appearance as her husband. But she was (almost unknown to herself) capable of a far deeper, truer devotion, had it been called forth by any reciprocal sentiment on Mr. Beaumont's part. It had failed, and she was thrown back upon herself, with all her treasure of womanly love unappreciated. Still she was of a bright, cheerful nature, and blessed with great sweetness of temper. She therefore had to make the best of her situation, and



to fret as little as she could over the discovery that, as far as her husband's society went, her married life was a failure.

## CHAPTER II.

TOWARDS the close of the first year of their married life, their eldest child, a boy, was born; then it was nine years before another came, and that was a girl. It may be supposed that Mrs. Beaumont was a very devoted mother. Every woman who has tasted something of the bitterness of disappointment in her wifely attachment, turns with redoubled ardour towards the little being who seems sent in an especial manner to make up for the want of all other love. A mother's love for her first child! Who needs write upon that subject, or dilate upon the joys of that new and wondrous world

into which that young existence leads the happy author of it?

Mrs. Beaumont was no exception to the general feeling. She was but nineteen when her boy was born, and she had already begun to be conscious of some of the desolating experiences of an uncongenial marriage. No doubt she hoped, with all a young wife's trusting love, that this great event would induce her husband more constantly to seek her society than he had hitherto done, and that the charms of this exceptionally beautiful baby would make him forget everything in the world save its existence and the delights of its infantile companionship. Vain hope indeed! Mr. Beaumont was well pleased with the birth of his son and heir, and said and did all that was customary on such occasions, to testify his satisfaction, and attest the importance of the event. The

child grew and prospered, was a healthy, handsome boy, and got through all infantine perils with such ease and expedition as to cause no undue solicitude as to his eventual welfare. In fact, Mr. Beaumont was perfectly contented, for the first seven years of his life, to leave his boy to the undisputed management of his mother, and the experienced nurse who shared the charge with her. He was not naturally fond of children—he disliked noise, and anything like fuss or worry. So Master Louis was more frequently ordered out of the drawing-room, when his father came into it, than sent for to make the agreeable, whilst it pleased him to remain in that apartment. At seven years old, a tutor was engaged by Mr. Beaumont himself; and at nine, preparations were making for sending the young gentleman to school, when another important

event occurred in the family—his little sister made her appearance.

It was soon after her birth that Mr. Beaumont, during a long day's hunting, caught a chill, which resulted in a dangerous attack of cold, that, after weary alternations of hope and fear, terminated fatally in the course of a twelvemonth. During that long, lingering illness, he and his wife were brought nearer together than they had been in all the years of their married life, but still without much happy result. Her anxious attentions, though well meant and sincere, were only worrying to the irritable invalid; and whilst, to a certain degree, he permitted, he inwardly deprecated and disliked them. It was with no unkind feeling towards his wife, and arose only from his constitutional dislike to being made an object of constant care and observation.

Mr. Beaumont at that time began to take more pleasure in the companionship of his boy than of his mother. The child had, on his part, a sort of shy admiration and affection for his father, which had all unconsciously been growing up in his young heart all his life, although so little noticed by his father in his infancy. Still, with childish ingratitude (although fond enough in a way of his mother), he clung with delighted pride and preference to his father's society. It was a pleasure, however, which the boy enjoyed in the most undemonstrative manner—never by word or deed testifying the joy he experienced when permitted to bring his book or his drawing into the invalid's room, and employ himself quietly there.

It was that very undemonstrative quietness which made the boy a more welcome companion than the poor anxious wife, whose

heart lay on her lips and shone in her wistful eyes whenever her husband coughed, or moved uneasily in his chair, as his breathing became oppressed. The boy took apparently no notice, and the invalid could sigh, or even moan, without running the risk of exciting any anxious inquiry, or having hopeless remedies forced on his attention, with the fatigue of declining all such vain efforts for his relief.

It was during that weary lingering year of anxious suspense, often repulsed—though sometimes tolerated—that Mrs. Beaumont found her chief support and comfort in the society of Kenneth Maxwell, who had been appointed by the London physician to watch her husband's case, and send daily reports of his patient. Although he had been a husband, and was still a father, Mr. Maxwell was far too young to have risen to any degree of

eminence in his profession. He was, however, naturally clever, well educated, and gentlemanlike. He had been chosen by Dr. Lethbridge as a fitting person for the confidential position in which he placed him. Kenneth Maxwell had entered upon his profession as an army surgeon—and accompanied his regiment to India, where his good looks and gentlemanlike address won the heart of one of his Colonel's pretty daughters; and no objection being made to the match, they were married, after a short acquaintance.

Losing his young wife after a very brief experience of married happiness, Mr. Maxwell relinquished his post, and returned to England with his little daughter. Having no fortune, and few family ties, circumstances brought him to the town of Castleford, and there he elected to fix his residence, with an



elder sister (afterwards Mrs. Penrose) who was to keep his house and take care of little Ruth. He was just beginning to make his way in the neighbourhood around, when Mr. Beaumont's case came under his care ; and very fortunate did Mr. Maxwell esteem himself when the great Dr. Lethbridge saw fit to place so great a responsibility in his hands. He felt perfectly equal to the trust depending on his medical knowledge and skill, and devoted all his energies to the benefit of his patient.

Thus he came to be a constant inmate of the sick man's house. But never dreaming for a moment, at that time, of his patient's wife being anything more to him than the most uninteresting of the many wives who had sick husbands to nurse and comfort, and whom he attended in his professional career. Nor, be it remarked, was

there ever the slightest, lightest indication on Mrs. Beaumont's part of any feeling that was incompatible with a wife's strictest duty and affection. Their acquaintance was indeed begun at that time, but their intimacy was of a later date. Still in those days the troubled anxious woman found her chief stay and comfort in the presence of **Kenneth Maxwell**. **Mr. Beaumont**, too, liked his new medical attendant; if he had not happened to fancy **Mr. Maxwell**, all **Dr. Lethbridge's** eloquence would have failed in the recommendation; but the fact was, the restless patient found something of a soothing and even pleasurable nature in the tone of **Mr. Maxwell's** conversation and company. **Mrs. Beaumont** was too glad, in observing the good effects of **Mr. Maxwell's** visits, to feel annoyed that all her efforts to entertain and enliven could never produce

the same results. She was an unselfish woman, and eagerly welcomed the man who so far could benefit her husband. Little Louis was not as amiable as his mother; he had a childish jealousy of the "Doctor," for his own company was generally dispensed with when Mr. Maxwell was announced.

He had other causes, too, of dislike to this unconscious subject of the feeling. "The Doctor," as the boy always termed Kenneth Maxwell, had interfered two or three times to prevent some pernicious acts of indulgence towards him on his mother's part—for all of which, although saying nothing at the time, Louis Beaumont entertained a species of grudge against his father's medical friend.

Time went on, and in spite of all that care and skill and anxious watching could do, Mr. Beaumont rapidly approached his end. Ere that time came, his only brother, Colonel

Beaumont, returned from foreign service, in time to be with him the last few weeks of his existence. To this brother Mr. Beaumont committed the entire charge of his family; and it was found, on his will being read, that Colonel Beaumont was left sole guardian of his children, with absolute power to arrange for them in every particular. To his widow was bequeathed a large and handsome jointure, to be enjoyed by her—as well as continued residence at Harewood Park—as long as she remained his widow. Should she chance to marry again, the small sum of four thousand pounds was the alternative.

Mrs. Beaumont had no fortune of her own, and her father was dead; so, unless she married extremely well, it was obviously her interest to remain as she was—mistress of Harewood Park (till her son's majority),

and with a large jointure at her command, besides the very liberal provision allowed to her for his two children whilst under age.

The first year of her widowhood passed very quietly and uneventfully. She fancied her little girl was delicate, and was herself so unnerved by all she had gone through during that weary year of watching in vain, that Mr. Maxwell strongly advised Mrs. Beaumont to change the scene entirely, and take a house near the sea for some months. She submitted her plans to her brother-in-law, as she soon found she could not move her children a step without his concurrence. However, she was a woman who had never been used to rule, and was, moreover, rather disposed to yield to the authority of others, so she smothered her mortification, and applied to Colonel Beaumont for advice—

she would not, even to herself, call it leave. He responded in a pleasant and gentlemanly manner, and she accordingly took her children with her and spent the next year in moving from one pleasant sea place to another. Colonel Beaumont had signified his intention of placing his eldest ward at a good school, preparatory for Eton, in a short time; and Mrs. Beaumont, knowing that had been her late husband's intention, never dreamt of opposing the plan.

Soon after her return to Harewood Park, Colonel Beaumont came and fetched his nephew away, and the widow and her little girl were left in the large desolate mansion alone. The first parting with her boy was no doubt a great trial, and yet she was not altogether sorry. Louis felt his father's death far more deeply than anyone suspected, and he was often found moping about in

solitary places, which had formerly been frequented by his father, when he was permitted to accompany him. The little sister was no playmate for the boy of ten years old; and having then no tutor, his mother often desired to keep him with herself—forbidding the companionship of servants. Thus it was that the child became restless and wayward—longing for something, he knew not what, and often crying for the father of whom he had in fact seen so little.

The summons to prepare for school was therefore not wholly unwelcome, either to the child or his mother. Still the boy deeply resented a remark made somewhat incautiously in his hearing by Mr. Maxwell, to the intent that it was high time he should be going to school, as he would become utterly spoilt if left much longer to dawdle about in idleness. A bitter and angry

feeling sprang up in the boy's heart, and he turned a sullen look on the "Doctor" and his mother, with whom he also felt displeased for listening with apparent complacency to his remarks. "As if," thought he in his childish wrath, "he had a right to come here whenever he pleases, and talk to my mamma, whilst I am to be sent away from my own poor papa's house. Well, I only know when I am a man, and it is mine, Doctor Maxwell shall never come into it."

However, for the time being, Master Louis went his way to school, and at rare intervals his enemy, as he considered him, continued to make visits to the Park, which, it must be admitted, were not altogether professional. It is needless now to recapitulate, or to inquire into the state of these two hearts, which, in their utter loneliness, were unconsciously drawing so near to each other.



The great event which brought poor Mrs. Beaumont and her medical friend into daily communion at that time, need only be briefly mentioned. It was the dangerous illness of little Maude, who sickened with a fever which was very prevalent in the neighbourhood. There was no doubt that, humanly speaking, the child owed its recovery to the devoted care bestowed upon it, joined to the medical skill displayed by the doctor. The mother's gratitude knew no bounds when assured of that fact by her London physician, Dr. Lethbridge. Colonel Beaumont came down to see his little niece, and make a hurried visit to his sister-in-law in her trouble.

The child recovered rapidly, and soon lost all traces of the danger she had passed through. Not so the mother—the danger deepened around her; but she was too

fascinated with her peril to be able to seek safety, either in flight, or in forbidding her house to the man who had saved her child's life. At last Kenneth Maxwell's eyes were opened too, and he did what he could, after all the mischief had been done. He left his house and practice, and went away. But, "what will be, will be." A few months later he and Mrs. Beaumont accidentally met in London, where he had betaken himself. After a few heroic resolutions, and a great deal of misery on both sides, their resolution gave way, and they agreed at last to run all chances—to marry and be happy.

## CHAPTER III.

AND married they were, just after the close of Mrs. Beaumont's second year of widowhood. But as to the happiness—what of that? Well, after a certain fashion, it must be confessed they were happy to a certain extent, for they were devotedly attached to each other. Many a second marriage is happier than the first. Perhaps it is because people know better what is likely to suit them than they did in the days of their thoughtless youth, and expect less perfection from the object of their new choice.

Mrs. Beaumont had found out that great possessions do not confer happiness ; but she had hardly calculated on the miseries arising from poverty and a precarious income. Still less had she believed it possible that any mortal man would have the cruelty to separate her from her children, because she had chosen to marry a man who had saved the life of one of them, and been the highly-esteemed medical attendant of her late husband. Yet she was aware that she had, in a manner, descended from her high social position in contracting this second marriage, and that she should have to brave some unpleasant remarks, and possibly become the subject of a nine days' wonder and gossip ; but that over, and all the unpleasant remarks said, and observations made, no doubt Colonel Beaumont would hear reason, and be amenable to such

representations and arguments as she should address to him.

So she thought, or, at least, so she said to her husband a week after their marriage, when she had time to discuss the all-important subject.

Kenneth Maxwell feared things would not run so smoothly as his newly-wedded wife seemed to think. He had grave doubts and misgivings on the subject. He could not but blame himself for the headlong passion which had carried all before it, and was likely to bring such woe on the woman he loved only too well. Still young—for she was but nine-and-twenty—Mrs. Maxwell was more beautiful than Amelia Harding, or even Mrs. Beaumont, had ever been, for her delicate features had gained in expression what they might have lost in youthful bloom; and her husband felt, as he gazed

upon her sweet countenance, as if the sacrifices she had made for him could never be adequately repaid by his whole life's devotion, with its deep undying affection.

It is an elevating thing to be so loved, and a woman's nature rises as it responds to the feeling; whilst to be conscious she is uncared-for lowers and degrades all that is most sacred and lovely in a woman's heart. And so it had been in Mrs. Beaumont's former married experience. The contrast was too great not to be recognized, and it called forth every dormant feeling of love and gratitude towards her present husband. At that time they had no fears as to fortune. They each held an all-sufficient sum for the contingencies of a year or two to come; and Kenneth, who was but thirty, was rising in his profession, and meant to be famous in time, for the sake of the dear, confiding

woman who had risked her all for his sake.

They were both unprepared for the fury of the storm that was about to burst on their devoted heads; but it soon overtook them.

Mrs. Maxwell had kept her intentions secret up to the day of her marriage, which took place in London. She then sent little Maude with her nurse back to Harewood, promising she would be with her again in the course of a month or six weeks (which she fully intended), only saying she was going to make a little tour abroad for that time. She certainly expected that Colonel Beaumont would be displeased with her marriage, and she even knew that she had forfeited her jointure; but still she thought the large allowance made for her children would supply everything they required; and

she fully intended to make her husband relinquish his profession, and give the full benefit of his valuable help and advice to her in the management of her family. What, then, was her horror and dismay, when she found herself formally renounced by Colonel Beaumont, as being no longer his brother's widow, and having no claim or right to the management of her children; and that, "in consequence of her disgraceful marriage, he should think it his duty to separate both her son and her daughter as entirely as lay in his power from her; concluding his letter with the remark that the four thousand pounds devised to her by his poor brother's liberality would be paid to her immediate order, after which she must consider all connexion with the family of Beaumont at an end for ever.

Colonel Beaumont had a peculiar and



private cause for the extreme anger and irritation he displayed on this unhappy occasion. The fact was, he was about to be extremely well married himself. The young lady was a Welsh heiress of large fortune, very ancient family, and considerable beauty. So this blot, as he considered it, on the family escutcheon, occurring just then, was annoying in no common degree. He had been proud of his brother's position in their own county. He liked his marriage with Amelia Harding, as a perfectly suitable connexion, and had thought with pleasure and satisfaction of presenting her to the lovely, high-born girl who had just consented to become his wife. And now—to find the mother of his brother's children metamorphosed into Mrs. Maxwell, the surgeon's wife at Castleford! It was too much for the endurance of such a proud, aristocratic-

mind man as Colonel Beaumont; and the only thing that remained for him to do—and his brother's will gave him the power—was to lop off the offending branch from the family tree, and rescue the children from the degradation of such a connection. Henceforth they were to be motherless!

To lighten this blow, the full force of which the stern man hardly comprehended, he had recourse to a line of conduct, in regard to his brother's children, which could in no way be justified. That was, to close their hearts against their mother by instilling into them all the bitter prejudice and ill-will with which his own mind was filled to overflowing. The little girl of three years old was hardly a fitting subject on which to work, and yet she was told that her mamma, "Maude's own pretty mamma," as the poor child fondly called her, had left her,

and would not come back any more; and when the little girl, with a pitiful look, asked "Why?" she was told "Mamma did not love her well enough to stay."

With the boy Colonel Beaumont found his task easy. It was not that he had not loved his gentle, indulgent mother, but he was already jealous of Mr. Maxwell's influence and interference; and when told that in marrying him she had disgraced not only herself, but him, and his sister, and his dead father's memory also, then the boy, with a quivering lip and heaving chest, and with hands tightly clenched, to keep down the rising sobs and tears, exclaimed,

"Then she is my mamma no longer! I will never see her or speak to her again!"

And when Louis, soon after his return to school, received a passionate appeal of affection in a letter from his mother, the boy,

without saying a word to anyone, enclosed the letter, and re-directed it, in his well-known boyish round-hand, with a line on the inside of the corner, saying it was a mistake, he knew no "Mrs. Maxwell;" after that, he at once sent it to the address so fondly given, in the hope of an answering letter of affection from her child. Then the boy (having posted it himself) stole away from his schoolfellows, and spent the allotted play-hour alone in a secluded place, lying on the grass, and indulging in such a bitter agony of tears as he never forgot all the succeeding days of his life.

Colonel Beaumont's marriage came off in due time, and all his wife's friends said how properly he had acted in removing his brother's children from all intercourse with their offending mother, whilst his bride kindly proposed that the children should

make their future home at his house (or *hers*, rather). It was also proposed that they should make a yearly visit in the boy's Summer holidays to Harewood Park, so that his interest in the old place might be kept up, until he should take possession of the same, on attaining his majority.

And so things were finally arranged, and as the next year brought a little daughter to Colonel Beaumont's house, his niece, about four years older, was brought up and educated with their little Gwendoline. She was, like her mother, an only child, and the two girls grew up affectionately attached to each other.

Colonel Beaumont, after his marriage, took his wife's name, in addition to his own, whilst his daughter was only known by that of her mother. She was always called Miss Powys, otherwise the two girls might have

been taken for sisters. Whilst Louis was a boy, and for some time after, he made his uncle and guardian's house his home. But on coming of age he took up his abode at his own place, where he found his uncle had been not only a faithful friend and guardian to himself, but his interests in every way had been most carefully looked after. His sister, being so many years younger, was left under the care of her uncle and aunt as before.

Everything went on well with the Beaumont family at their beautiful place, Rhys Castle, in Wales, for several years. Then came the sad reverse, and death entered their happy prosperous household. In one year both the father and mother were taken away, and Gwendoline Powys, at sixteen, found herself an orphan. Maude Beaumont's loss was hardly less severe, for she

remembered nothing of her own parents, and her uncle and his wife had represented to her all she knew of those relations. She was about twenty at that time. Colonel Beaumont-Powys had left a will—having survived his wife a few months—in which he committed his only child, and her large fortune, to the care and guardianship of his late ward and nephew, Louis Beaumont, of Harewood Park. And, in accordance with his expressed wish, the two girls took up their abode at Mr. Beaumont's place, under the future charge of their faithful friend and governess, Mrs. Nelson.

The change from the old house was indeed found necessary for Gwendoline, whose young, bright nature was perfectly overwhelmed with sorrow and consternation at the successive calamities that had desolated her happy home. Mr. Beaumont came

and took the two mourning girls home with him. He had been travelling about for two or three previous years, and knew little of his young cousin, except as a perfect child, of whom, in the pride of his young manhood, he had taken but little notice. He had forgotten the difference that three years must have made in the child of thirteen, who was, perhaps, rather small and backward for her age.

It had been part of Mrs. Powys-Beaumont's system of education (though devotedly fond of her daughter) to keep her a child as long as possible. With all Gwendoline's brilliant expectations and promise of beauty the mother was right, and it seemed hard that she should have been called away before her maternal work was half completed. With Maude her aunt pursued a different course, though it might



have been as much owing to the difference of their ages as of their prospective positions. Maude was brought forward, made much of, and early introduced into society, where she was much admired, but the fortune assigned to her by her father's will was very small. No doubt it would have been increased had he lived longer ; but as it was, everything went to increase the fortune and estate of the more important son, and first-born child. So Mrs. Powys-Beaumont, in her worldly wisdom, used to observe, "Maude must marry well;" and considered that it was incumbent on her to give her every chance of doing so. She also, in the same spirit, believed it her duty to ignore the existence of her mother, the surgeon's wife ; and in that idea she was rigidly upheld by her husband, who could never speak without anger of his brother's wife,

after she became Mrs. Maxwell. Maude fully believed that her mother had deserted her children, to form a low marriage with some obscure medical man, with whom it would be a lasting disgrace to associate.

What her brother thought on that subject could only be guessed at from his entire silence. He never spoke of his mother, or in any way alluded to such a relationship; nor had he once made the slightest attempt to see or hear of her after he became his own master, and took possession of the home she had once beautified by her presence, and made dear to him by her sweet motherly affection. Since the day when, as a schoolboy, he returned his mother's letter, he had never recognised her existence by word, deed, or sign. Mrs. Maxwell was, to all intents and purposes, as perfect a stranger to her son, and he to her, as if

she had never borne his father's honoured name, or caressed him in her arms in infancy, and watched over his childish days, with such anxious, unremitting and ill-requited motherly love.

## CHAPTER IV.

LOUIS BEAUMONT had been settled about a year in his responsible position of guardian to his sister and her cousin, and was living quietly with them at his own place, Harewood Park, when Ruth Maxwell came into possession of her house and pleasant home in the adjoining town of Castleford, only three miles distant.

The Beaumonts had been living very quietly during that time—neither of the girls caring to go out, or entertain society at home. Gwendoline's passionate grief had passed away under the healing influences of

time, change of abode, and the unwearied care and attention of her friends. She raised her pretty head once more—something like a beautiful delicate rose after a too abundant shower. By degrees she shook off the encumbering drops of sorrow, and regained all her natural loveliness of colouring, though there was still a shade of sadness remaining; but it seemed only to render her more dear and interesting to her friends.

It was no wonder, therefore, that, as her cousin took daily note of her returning cheerfulness, and the power he seemed to possess of chasing the light clouds from that beautiful brow, he should consider it a very pleasing task to devote himself frequently to that employment. But Louis did not think it at all necessary to shut himself up with the two young ladies and their

elderly companion. He visited in the neighbourhood, as usual, entertained a few bachelor friends, as he had been wont to do, and went to London in due season.

And so a year crept on. Gwendoline had passed her seventeenth birthday, and Maude was one-and-twenty. A governess was no longer needed for the young heiress ; but Mrs. Nelson remained willingly as companion to the two girls. The year of mourning and retirement being over, Maude declared she should make visits in the neighbourhood, and take her place at the head of her brother's table, to entertain such guests as it might please him to invite ; whilst Gwendoline, with some hesitation, announced her intention of doing as Maude might see fit in the way of society ; and her young guardian gravely declared he considered it quite right that she should do so.

It was bright September, and Harewood Park had opened its doors for the entertainment of a larger party of guests than it had ever done since the days that it had owned a mistress. Just at that same time its former mistress, now Mrs. Maxwell, and the step-mother of Ruth, found herself placed in a very different position from the splendour and gaiety of her early married life, though about to return so near to the scene of it all.

It was, as had been already said, Ruth Maxwell's birthday of five and twenty, and on the morning of that auspicious day, the lonely women were occupying a very small second-rate lodging in an obscure street in London. They had not been living there any time—only had come up a week before, to be at an easy distance for their contemplated journey to Castleford, which was about eighty miles north of the great city.

The day opened brightly that saw Ruth Maxwell an heiress, and a great one too, in comparison with her former experiences. The two women met and kissed each other in silence; the face of the younger was radiant with suppressed pleasure and emotion—that of the elder spoke of a sleepless night and troubled anxious thought. After a few moments she spoke a few words of congratulatory good wishes to her companion, which were received with a simple “Thank you, mother,” and a warmer embrace than before. Then the two sat down to their frugal meal. Ruth made the tea and prepared her mother’s toast; but the tea was drunk and the toast crumbled, not eaten—in silence. Ruth looked up from time to time into her step-mother’s face, but till the table was cleared she said nothing; then she asked,



"Well, mother, have you decided about the trains—it is time we should fix something?" adding a moment afterwards, with a smile, "Only think, dear, if we did not arrive in proper time, what might happen!"

"You think Mr. John Penrose might find some cause to deprive you of your long looked-for property? No, you shall run no such risk for my sake, Ruth; therefore I should advise your taking the earliest—that is the half-past eleven—it is only half-past nine now."

"It must be later, mother," said Ruth, looking absently out of the dim window into the dreary street. "No—it is not—I hear the postman's knock—a letter for us, mother. Who can it be from?"

"Look, and you can tell me, dear. I am sure I cannot guess," replied Mrs. Maxwell,

as the servant-girl, coming in, laid a letter before Ruth.

"It is from Mr. Penrose, mother," said Ruth, handing the letter and its contents to her stepmother.

"Very thoughtful of him. I hope, from the style of his letter, too, that you will have no trouble with him, as you are unfortunately placed so much at his mercy."

It was a gentlemanlike note, with a cheque enclosed, saying he thought Miss Maxwell might like to receive some of her money, then due, previous to leaving London, and mentioning the best train to travel by, said a carriage should be in waiting for her at the railway station, to take her to Osmond Street, where her new house was situated.

"He seems to think I am coming home alone!" observed Ruth, thinking aloud—and

then glancing towards her step-mother, regretted she had made the remark; for though leaning her head on her hand, she shaded her face at the same time, yet a few stray tears trickled through the slender fingers, and Ruth remarked a trembling in the slight frame, that told of suppressed sobs.

Ruth was not a person of many words, but she went up to the silent figure, and kneeling down by her side, gently possessed herself of the disengaged hand which hung listlessly down, and whispered,

“What is it, mother dear?” Then receiving no answer, she continued, as if to herself, “Yes, I see; it must be a trial going back into that neighbourhood—but it is so long ago!” (Twenty years were as half a century in Ruth’s estimation.) “Cheer up, mother; look at me and smile, and say

we shall be happy together in our new home! Oh, mother, indeed, indeed I will try."

"I know you would, my good child—but—but—indeed, Ruth, I find I cannot do it; you must even do, as you said just now—go alone—leave me here—I shall do very well—you can come often to see me now you are so rich; but indeed I cannot go to Castleford. I find my strength of mind and body fails when I think of it—I shall be best here. Now, my child, go and get ready for your journey, and leave me quietly here."

"Never, mother," said the girl, with quiet determination in her voice, and rising from her kneeling position.

"But I have settled it all in my own mind, Ruth. I must stay—yes, I know what your looks say, that long, long ago I promised to go with you and share your

home. Forgive me, dear. I was too wretched then to know what I said ; but I did intend it, and thought I could bear anything better than losing you ; but last night I had a dream—I cannot repeat it—it was all confused ; but of past days, and those who are lost to me for ever. No, I cannot go to Castleford.”

“Very well, mother ; then neither shall I go to Castleford.”

“Nonsense, Ruth,” exclaimed Mrs. Maxwell, roused for the moment out of the consideration of her own private and personal grief, to the consideration of her step-daughter’s individual interests ; adding, “That would never do, my good child.”

Ruth spoke not for a few moments ; then she approached her mother, and again knelt at her side, and in a low, faltering voice said,

"Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to cease from following thee. Where thou goest, I will go. Where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, thy God my God. She of old, whose namesake I am, has spoken well for us both—has not she, mother?"

Mrs. Maxwell raised her head from her hand, and looked fondly into the calm face beside her; and then, with a faint smile, replied,

"Hardly, Ruth dear, for I have nothing, and no one in the world now belonging to me."

"Except *me*, mother."

"Yes, except you, my good child."

"And whom have I but you, mother?"

"You must not compare our cases in any way, Ruth; your young, hopeful life, and my desolate worn out-one. You will soon

find plenty of friends when once settled at Castleford—ay, and kindred too, no doubt, will claim you now.”

“Because I shall be well off, mother? Well, no one has claimed my relationship hitherto. You have been all in all to me ever since I was a tiny child; and will not you let me always be as I have been to you, mother dear?”

Then, seeing Mrs. Maxwell said no more, and wore a relenting look, she wound her arm round her neck, and gently kissing her, said,

“I see, mother, you will not send your poor child away into the wide world—we shall still keep together, as *he* would have wished it.”

“Well, well,” said Mrs. Maxwell, moved by that last appeal, “be it as you wish. I will go with you, Ruth, to your new home,

even as we had settled, let it cost me what it may !”

This last sentence was uttered in so low a voice that it never reached Ruth’s ears—neither did it enter into her imagination to conceive all that was comprised in the confession just made. Ruth knew her step-mother had lived somewhere near Castleford—it might have been even in the place—as she had met, and known, and married her father from thence ; but more she knew not, not even her maiden or former married name. When Mrs. Maxwell had found herself disowned, and cast off by all her family, and even her little children, then she, too, in anguish of heart, renounced every claim upon them. The name of Beaumont never passed her lips, nor was it one her devoted husband cared to recall to her recollection ; by a tacit mutual consent, they buried the



dead past. Not even Ruth, that dearly-loved child and only friend of the sorrowing woman, knew how deep a grief was ever lying heavy at her heart.

There had been enough of sorrow in their quiet household since the time that Ruth had passed her careless childhood, to account for any depth of shadow on her stepmother's fair brow. Two bright, promising children had been successively taken from her, and, last of all, the almost idolized husband and father. Yes, Ruth was indeed all in all to her. Mrs. Maxwell had loved the child when first her newly-wedded husband brought Ruth, a gentle, grave child, to her, and claimed a mother's love for his five years old little girl.

Ruth had been always a thoughtful child, carefully brought up by Mr. Maxwell's sister, who shortly after married Mr. Pen-

rose, loving the little girl much in her own undemonstrative way, and grieved to give her up even then to her brother's new wife. The change was a happy one to the child, and her whole being expanded under it. The sweet, caressing ways of her new mother took the child's warm little heart captive at once. Miss Maxwell had been too wise, as well as too good a woman, to endeavour to instil aught of vulgar prejudice in her little niece's mind against her father's newly-married wife. Thus it happened that the child and her step-mother were both left to commence their new relationship without any counteracting influence in the minds of either.

Mrs. Maxwell gladly accepted her husband's child, and took her as her own; whilst the little girl, from the first moment of their meeting, loved the new mother—

indeed, the only one she had ever known. Then, in the course of a few years, when the new claimants on a mother's love came, Ruth, as the elder sister, became still more necessary and useful in the increasing family. At a very early age, she was quite the presiding spirit of the nursery, with her grave, quiet ways, taking almost a mother's part in the little household. Two of these children died quite babies, but the other two grew up and thrived; and Ruth was quite as fond and proud of little Rose's beauty as her mother, and had as implicit belief in the wonderful talent and promise of her young brother Kenneth. Alas! for all worldly hopes and expectations, the two children both died, one barely ten, whilst the other grew up to be fourteen; and then, when the days of mourning were barely ended, the father was taken away.

Mr. Maxwell had never been a prosperous man after he had married again ; perhaps he was too anxious to secure wealth for the woman he loved. Instead of keeping steadily to the place he first went to, he moved about from one town to another, hoping to increase his practice and the number of his patients, and, as it may be supposed, ruined his own fortune in so doing. He never became sufficiently well known to secure the standing to which his undoubted talent entitled him, and yet received sufficient encouragement in his profession to make him feel it ought to have been a greater source of wealth to him than it ever became. Thus it was that Mr. Maxwell left England—he could hardly have remained in Castleford on his wife's account—and tried various places abroad with more or less success ; and then, wearying of the life

there, the doctor removed with his family to Jersey, where a good opening had at last presented itself.

## CHAPTER V.

AND there it was that Kenneth Maxwell passed the few last years of his life—and there it was he died. There is no need to recall that time of bitter suffering to the sorrowing widow and the devoted daughter. They were left quite alone, more closely united than ever in the memory of the death-beds they had tended together, with hallowed recollections that none other but themselves could ever share together. And yet, strange to say, as the two desolate women wept together, the elder never said to the younger that she was still the mother

of living children of her own, and that the day might yet dawn for her when her mourning might be turned to gladness. Perhaps it was that Mrs. Maxwell never anticipated the arrival of such a day, and clung to her step-child as the only remaining link that united her to the living world.

They continued to live on in Jersey, for both her children, as well as her husband, were buried there, and it seemed more like home to them than any other place in the world; and so the time passed on uneventfully, till the tidings came that Ruth Maxwell would, in the course of a year or two more, be entitled to a good fortune, as well as house of her own. Ruth had kept up a correspondence at long intervals with her father's sister, Mrs. Penrose, though she had never been to visit her after

they had settled in Jersey. They had lived there comfortably enough in her father's lifetime, for he had a tolerable practice, after he once became known; but just as he was rising into wider notice the fever broke out that took him off in the midst of his greatest professional activity and usefulness. There was but little left for his widow and daughter, for they had lived up to their means, and had even before that spent some part of Mrs. Maxwell's small fortune—her husband having fully reckoned on replacing and adding to it in the years to come. Ruth would willingly have sought some employment, to relieve her step-mother of the burden of her maintenance, in the very narrow circumstances in which they found themselves left; but Mrs. Maxwell so strongly opposed the idea of Ruth's leaving her, and going out as a governess, that the girl sub-



mitted to a decision which was, in fact, only too welcome.

Thus they lived on, with a bare sufficiency, yet enough for most of their simple wants and wishes. The place was cheap, and their neighbours were kind and friendly, and neither Mrs. Maxwell nor Ruth felt inclined to venture into a wider or more distant world than that they had made around them.

Mrs. Maxwell had become so crushed in spirit with all that had befallen her, that she had long ceased to speculate on any future that might yet remain to her, or on the possibility of ever knowing the children who had so long disowned and neglected her. Still, in the very depths of her heart, there were memories of the long past, which would, no doubt, often strive for ascendancy over the present, but were resolutely crushed

down and ignored when thus seeking to assert themselves.

It was a new and startling glimpse into the future that Ruth's bright prospects at length brought home to her step-mother, as well as to herself. And when all the conditions of the bequest were made fully known, and duly recognized by the two women, there ensued a sore trial in the heart of the elder. Ruth was but little aware of the real cause of her step-mother's shrinking dread of going once more to Castleford. As has been already said, she divined it in part, but of the great motives that were so busy she knew and suspected nothing. And all the time, whilst Mrs. Maxwell was overwhelmed with the idea of re-entering that neighbourhood, and placing herself in such close vicinity to her unknown children, there was a voice within that urged her on, even

against her own pre-conceived wish and will.

At first Mrs. Maxwell would have had Ruth go alone. Then she found that idea was too painful and insupportable. Neither could the girl be persuaded by any amount of reasoning to believe that it could be good either for her or her mother that she should do so. The result has been seen. Mrs. Maxwell had been prevailed on to accompany her step-daughter to London; and she had also done it with a degree of willingness on her part that showed how she clung to her husband's child, and how, in spite of everything there was to wound her feelings in the prospect before her, she yet steadily decided upon sharing Ruth's fate, and making her happy in so doing. Then, at the very last, there came, as we have seen, a new and strange revulsion of feel-

ing and intention on Mrs. Maxwell's part, and, at the eleventh hour, she would have hung back and returned to her desolate island home.

Ruth, however, conquered once more, and after that Mrs. Maxwell seemed to feel it was useless to struggle further. What would be, would be. She would go with the only creature in the world who loved her, and would try to steel her heart against all the bitter recollections as well as realities which might await her in her new phase of existence. And with that resolution, Mrs. Maxwell, crushing down the haunting thoughts of former days, prepared to keep her daughter company in those that were to come.

It was rather late before they started from London that afternoon. Mrs. Maxwell's struggles and scruples had delayed

them, and when they did get off at last, it was in fear that they might not be able to reach the last train that was available for them that day ; and it was requisite that Ruth should be there without fail, to claim her property, or there was every chance of her forfeiting the same. Happily no unforeseen impediment occurred, and when the railway cab set them down at the station, they found they were just in time. In five minutes more Mrs. Maxwell and Ruth were once more on the road to Castleford.

What busy thoughts were thronging through the minds of each as, seated opposite to each other, they both looked calmly through the window at the fields and houses they seemed to be flying past ! How little did Ruth suspect the subject of her step-mother's thoughts, or guess the living

interests that were crowding and shaping themselves into coming realities there! On Mrs. Maxwell's part it never occurred to her that in so keeping the door of the past closely shut, and leaving her all in darkness without, it was hardly fair upon Ruth, or on her constant devotion. But the subject had been too painful to discuss even with her, and, but for the late unexpected turn of events, she might have never have been called on to speculate on the matter. And thus they travelled on. Mrs. Maxwell complained of headache, and leaned back silent in one corner of the carriage; whilst Ruth sat opposite, absorbed in her own meditations.

It was late when they reached the last station but one from Castleford. It was a newly-made line, and branched off from the general one, so the Castleford passengers had

to leave the main train, which went on, and wait for one which was expected a few minutes later to take them on. Mrs. Maxwell and her daughter got out, and went into the waiting-room, in which there were already several other passengers awaiting the coming up of the Castleford train. They were apparently a party returning from some distant place of amusement in the neighbourhood, the ladies being dressed as if for such an occasion ; and there were, besides, some bows and arrows in cases, intimating the nature of part of the day's entertainment.

Ruth took notice of these things, with a mind at ease and interested in all that was going on around her. Not so her step-mother ; for, seated on a sofa far apart from the gay group talking merrily amongst themselves, she only occasionally raised her

eyes to look at the clock, which was placed over the empty fireplace of the room where they were assembled. At length she remarked wearily,

"It is almost ten o'clock, Ruth. I thought we were to have gone on at half-past nine."

"Yes, mother, it is later than it ought to be. But I think I hear the train coming; I will go out and see."

And forthwith Ruth went out and stood on the platform, gazing into the increasing darkness with straining eyes, and listening for the coming train, which she now heard dimly thundering in the distance.

As it rapidly neared the station, a young girl came hurriedly out of the waiting-room, no doubt to make the same observation that Ruth was making, and as she caught sight of the glancing lights, now becoming dimly



nearer, she raised her voice and called out to her companions within the room,

“Yes, I am right ; it is the train at last. Come, make haste, that we may have a carriage to ourselves.”

As she spoke she turned her head, at the same time making an incautious step forward. The light was uncertain, and the edge of the place where the girl stood raised, so, missing her footing, and losing her balance, after a moment's frantic effort to hold her ground, the girl fell forward, and just in front of the train, which was rapidly nearing the station.

Ruth saw it all pass for a moment before her eyes with a paroxysm of terror she had never felt before. She had been standing longer on the edge of the platform, and her eye had become used to the light, and had discerned the inequality which had caused

the false step, involving the terrible accident that was likely to occur.

The shriek of the falling girl was followed by the still louder one of the approaching engine. It seemed about to immolate the poor prostrate form that lay huddled up in a quivering heap, whilst a stifled cry was uttered but not heard.

“Oh! help!—I cannot move!”

Ruth, without hearing, saw. With one bound she was at the side of the fallen girl, dragging her to the opposite side of the line—and yet hardly able to accomplish her self-imposed heroic deed of charity—in time to save the luckless girl or herself.

The alarm had been already given, and the platform was already alive with fear-stricken passengers, looking out into the obscurity, as the train slowly came to a standstill by the side of the platform, hiding

from their agonized gaze the two figures that had before been shadowed out in the depth of the darkness beyond and beneath. It was a moment of most horrible suspense. Were the two both killed, or was the fallen one the only victim?—that bright, beautiful young girl who had rushed on to that fatal platform all life, and energy, and spirits.

There was dead silence, whilst two young men, belonging to the party of which the girl formed one, went across the line, closely followed by a crowd of officials and gaping, wondering, but sympathising spectators. Even at the moment the two young women were first seen, it seemed uncertain whether one of them lived or not. The other, the elder and taller one—it was Ruth Maxwell—was holding the drooping form in her firm grasp; but the head lay

motionless on Ruth's shoulder, the hands hung down helplessly on either side. Ruth herself, with a scared, white face, stood looking at her insensible burden, till she was aware of a strong hand relieving her of its weight ; and then, as if suddenly awaking from her trance of terror, she became alive to all the realities of her present position. She could only falter out,

“She is safe!—she has fainted, and is not injured otherwise than by her first fall. Oh! take care—she is quite helpless!”

“And you—are you unhurt too?”

“Oh, yes!” with a sort of wonderment in her tone that anyone should care to ask or think about her.

The scene that followed may be imagined. The fainting form of the young girl was carefully removed by her terrified though relieved friends and companions, from the

public gaze that followed every movement after so wonderful an escape. Even the train was detained for a time, but at length, on ascertaining no real harm was done, the guard began to look up his scattered passengers, and the engine to puff forth signals of approaching departure.

"She would have been crushed but for that brave girl that jumped down to help her, and dragged her over to the other side," said one of the officials, designating the retiring form of Ruth, as she crept away from the crowd to join her mother, who sat in a state of bewildered suspense, not knowing what had occurred, and yet dreading to ask, and fearing to hear.

"I must go and thank her," replied the young man, "for it was a noble act of self-devotion for a stranger."

“Yes; and if she had not had her wits pretty well about her, there would have been two of them under the train instead of one. Many a woman in such a predicament would have tried to get the girl that had fallen up on this side, and been crushed to atoms, if she had done so, for there is no room here, you see—we come quite close to the platform; but once out there, the danger was at an end, though it must have been a moment’s hard struggle to get there, and the poor girl quite helpless. Well, well, all’s well that ends well; and now, sir, do you like to go on immediately by this train, or take the chance of the next?”

“Thank you, Mr. Ridley, you need not think about us. Miss Powys cannot be moved at present. I will thank you to

send one of your men on to Castleford—  
the carriage is waiting there, and tell them  
to come on here for us."

## CHAPTER VI.

RUTH had reached Mrs. Maxwell's side before the rumour of her late escape had reached her mother. Ruth glided up to her, and touched her, saying,

"Come, dear, the train is going on now ; we must not miss it—we are too late as it is."

"Yes, but it is not our fault, Ruth. Something must have happened—what is it?"

"That young lady had a fall ; she ran out on the platform to see if the train was coming ; it was dark, and she hit her



foot against the raised side and fell over."

Mrs. Maxwell made an exclamation of terror, and Ruth hastily said,

"There was no harm done; she is all safe, only shaken by the fall and frightened, as you may suppose. Come on now, mother, and I will tell you all about it when the train has started."

So the two quietly-dressed women took up their bags and small parcels, and walked up to the train, where the guard stood waiting their arrival. The man touched his hat with a movement of involuntary respect to Ruth, as he looked at the simple, unpretending bearing of the girl who had just performed such an heroic act at the risk of her own life. Beside the man stood another of a different stamp and carriage—a refined, gentleman-like young man, handsome, and with a very decided cast of coun-

tenance. He raised his hat to Ruth, and said, in a low voice,

“You must allow me to offer my sincerest thanks, both in my own person and also for my cousin, Miss Powys, who is unfortunately still too much unnerved to have any power of seeking you out, or tendering her own acknowledgments; but, indeed, madam, you have done us all a service we can never forget or sufficiently thank you for. May I ask to whom we are so greatly indebted?”

“Oh! indeed,” returned Ruth, startled out of her usual quiet self-possession at these unlooked-for thanks; and quite unwilling to think she had done anything out of the ordinary way, she faltered and fluttered, and only replied—“oh! indeed there is nothing to thank me for. I am very glad your cousin, the young lady, is not hurt. Good night, sir.” And then Ruth, blushing

at her own unwonted awkwardness, drew back into the carriage, and pulled up the glass, to show she considered the conference at an end, and had no intention of giving her name, as if she thought the gentleman and his cousin ought to remember it, and find some future opportunity of thanking her for doing an act she could not in common humanity have left undone.

“What a shy, lovely woman!” thought Louis Beaumont, as he watched the train till its lights disappeared in the darkness. “And yet she has plenty of pluck and resolution. How many women, I wonder, would have run the risk she did for a stranger? That girl must have a noble mind—she cannot bear to be thanked!” Then turning to the man by his side, he asked, “Do you know who those ladies are? Do they come this way often?”

"No, sir; quite strangers in these parts. Never seen either of them before. Widow lady and daughter, no doubt. The other lady was in weeds."

Mr. Beaumont had not thought about that other lady. His eye had coldly dwelt upon her veiled form for a moment, as he spoke to her daughter. Neither did the mother recognize her son in the stranger who had introduced himself to Ruth. No mysterious instinct warned her that he was the same whom in infancy she had loved with all a mother's devotion to her first-born child. It was too dark to recognize features, or she might have traced some resemblance to her first husband. But the fact was, it was Ruth, and Ruth's exploit, whatever it might have been, that at that moment occupied her mind, and seeing her safe, she had an uneasy sort of apprehension in

her mind of being too late, and that, if Ruth was not in the house to claim her possessions at the appointed time, she might chance to lose them altogether.

The name of Powys, too, misled her. She was abroad at the time of Colonel Beaumont's marriage, and had never heard, or wished to hear, the name of the lady he married. Everything connected with her brother-in-law was repugnant to Mrs. Maxwell's feelings; neither did her husband ever care to talk with her on the subject. It therefore just glanced across her mind, as she listened to the young man's speech, that he was a Mr. Powys, who, in mentioning the name as his cousin's, desired to let Ruth know it was his own.

A few minutes' brief explanation served to put Mrs. Maxwell in full possession of the facts of the case, and then both she and

Ruth had time to talk and tremble a little over the past peril and danger ; and after that Ruth owned to being somewhat shaken in body and mind by her late exertions, and glad to rest in silence for the remainder of the journey. But whilst a calm, quiet sleep refreshed her frame and tranquillized her nerves, Mrs. Maxwell was far more deeply moved and agitated, shedding tears, half of terror and half of thankfulness at Ruth's escape and preservation.

At length the lights of Castleford glanced brightly in the distance, and Mrs. Maxwell's thoughts were again diverted in a fresh direction. On reaching the station it seemed to her like entering a strange place, for everything there was quite new to her—the nearest railway had been in a different and distant direction in her day. So there were no old memories to depress her on looking

round the strange building. Great changes, too, had taken place in the old town since she had last been there; but it was only on rare occasions that she had ever passed a whole day within its precincts. So her recollections were chiefly confined to streets and shops, which in the last twenty years had altered in various ways.

Of all this Mrs. Maxwell took languid notice, as they drove through the gas-lighted streets, so dull and dark in the days when, as Mrs. Beaumont, she attended the balls at the Shire Hall, or was wont occasionally to patronize the theatrical company who made their yearly visit at stated seasons to Castleford. Her late husband's house had been in a by-street, and that she heard had long been pulled down to make way for a larger and more pretentious mansion, which was inhabited by the prosperous

medical man who had succeeded to Kenneth Maxwell's practice, and who acquired that fame and fortune, by steady application, which had failed to favour his far cleverer predecessor. But Mrs. Maxwell had never lived in the old house, nor would she even have recognised it, had it remained as it was.

The railway cab rattled on, all regardless of chances and changes ; and at length brought the two lonely women to an open iron gate, a few yards in front of the house, which was placed in the background, and, by means of a small belt of shrubs within the wall, sheltered from the gaze of casual passengers in the streets.

"How nice this is, mother !—in the street, and yet concealed from it ! But perhaps not so convenient on rainy evenings, if we should chance to go out !" exclaimed Ruth,



who had woke up refreshed and able to appreciate the charm of entering a house that was in reality a home and her *own* at the same time.

Ruth had jumped lightly out of the carriage, and run into the house first, that she might be able to turn round and receive her mother at the door of her own house, and welcome her there, which she did with a very loving and warm embrace. Mrs. Maxwell returned her step-daughter's kiss with a few kindly words of congratulation, but all the energy of former days had died out of Mrs. Maxwell's nature. She had arrived at that last dull level of feeling which is utterly powerless to respond warmly to any sentiment of hope or joy. She could not help it, poor woman! The fault was not in herself, but in the adverse circumstances which had so long oppressed

her. There was, however, yet an unsuspected chord of feeling in her weary heart that might be touched. But Ruth, with all her unselfish tenderness, was powerless to reach it. It lay too deep, and had been too long buried under the ruin of so many dead hopes and affections ; but still there it was, like the seed in the stone coffin, that might yet put forth bud and blossom, and bear fruit, if it be discovered and kindly nurtured.

Ruth's spirits rose as she looked round that pleasant little hall, from the ceiling of which a cheerful light depended, imparting an air of home and comfort to everything it shone upon.

Two neat women-servants appeared, curtsying to their new mistress—the elder one saying,

“Mr. Penrose has been expecting you all the afternoon, but he would not go away

till the last train came in. He is waiting for you in the little parlour."

Ruth started at this intimation ; it seemed an intrusion on the privacy of her coming home, and an assumption of intimacy and authority that she was already disposed to resent. However, checking the remark she was about to make, she walked on, followed by her mother, and entered the well-remembered little parlour ; and there she found, as she expected, a gentleman in full possession. Ruth drew herself up, and stood for a moment by the door, as if surprised to find the room occupied. Mr. Penrose was standing up when the two ladies entered ; and then, glancing rapidly from one to the other, he advanced towards Ruth with an extended hand, at the same time bowing to Mrs. Maxwell, who stood behind her daughter.

"Miss Maxwell, I believe I may claim a previous acquaintance ; but so long ago, I daresay you have forgotten your fellow visitor in my uncle's house ; but I need not introduce myself, as of course you could not expect to see anyone but myself in this house to-night."

"Indeed," replied Ruth, truthfully, but rather frigidly, "we did not expect to find anyone here so late as it is to-night, and we are both very tired. But, perhaps, you will sit down?" added she, after a moment's pause, during which the recollection of her own duties as hostess pressed upon her mind.

"No, thank you. I shall not detain you or Mrs. Maxwell a moment longer than is needful from the repose which, I am sure, you must require, but my duty as guardian requires my seeing you in possession this

night, and formally giving up to you the key of your own house. I wish it had been a few minutes earlier," said Mr. Penrose, glancing up at the clock, which pointed to a quarter-past twelve. "I am sorry to say the new day is begun; but it cannot make much difference—only you ought, by rights, to have taken possession before twelve o'clock. And it was for that purpose I wrote, mentioning trains, &c."

"It was my fault," said Mrs. Maxwell, now speaking for the first time. "I was undecided about coming down from London with Ruth, and that delayed her—only that."

"I am sorry for it, madam," again repeated Mr. Penrose, turning to Mrs. Maxwell, with an air of cold attention as she spoke. "Here is your key—won't you take it?" said Mr. Penrose, again addressing the lady of the house.

But Ruth looked at it distrustfully, rather putting it away from her by a little gesture, and saying, "I don't want any key at present. Pray don't trouble yourself about it at this time of night."

Mr. Penrose only smiled as if to himself; and then, laying the key on the table, took up his hat, and, with a brief good night to both the ladies, walked quickly out of the room and house.

Mrs. Maxwell and Ruth stood looking at each other in silence for a minute or two after Mr. Penrose's exit. Then, as they heard the hall-door close after him, Ruth laughed, and said,

"I did not think we should have visitors so late the first night of our arrival."

"Morning, you mean, my dear," replied Mrs. Maxwell, looking at the clock—"it is nearly one o'clock now."

"Yes; Mr. Penrose seemed desirous we should observe that, and I suppose would call it a day after the time! But it is easy to show the delay was caused by the train, and not by us. I do not think I need make myself unhappy about such a trifle."

"I think not indeed, my dear; neither do I think Mr. Penrose had any intention or making you so. I suppose he came, as a matter of course—or of ceremony, to see that you really did arrive at the proper time; and, by giving you that key, to put you in legal possession—at all events, he did not stay long."

"Quite long enough for a first visit, mother. I suppose we must go through a certain course of them, as he will have to tell us where to draw the money from for our income, and such like necessary information, of which I know nothing at present. I

wish it had been done through a regular lawyer, and not—not—not in this uncomfortable way!"

"Well, Ruth," said her step-mother, looking round the cheerful, home-like apartment, where one of the servants was arranging a small supper-tray, and lowering her voice as she spoke, "oh! my dear child, be thankful for such a haven of rest and comfort as you have entered this night. Remember, dear, there are drawbacks to every earthly enjoyment, and yours, in this case, is a very slight one."

"That remains to be proved, mother, dear; but I daresay Mr. Penrose will not turn out to be a very serious evil."

Ruth laughed, and spoke lightly, but there were tears in her eyes, which she brushed away as she took off her hat, and turned to place her mother's seat by the



table; then, as she stooped and kissed her, she whispered,

“Do not think I am not grateful, dearest mother.—Oh! how grateful, none but God can tell!”

## CHAPTER VII.

RUTH was up early the next morning—it was a bright, beautiful September day—and wandering about over the house, and in the garden, and through the little paddock, in all the unwonted delight of feeling she was the owner of all she saw.

That first taste of the joys of undisputed proprietorship was very new and sweet to Ruth Maxwell. Everything she saw was perfect in her eyes; and she rejoiced in the discovery that the house was not nearly so large as she had supposed it to be. Her recollections dated some ten years back, and every

object she remembered in and about the house had been greatly magnified in her youthful imagination, till they had all assumed an importance and size infinitely more considerable than they proved in reality to possess. But who does not review the distant scene of childish enjoyment through a magnifying lens of recollection? The old place was unaltered—the furniture was the same, she remembered, both in the little parlour usually occupied by the old couple, and the drawing-room, of larger dimensions, upstairs, and only used on state occasions. There was a cheerful dining-room below, long and low, and looking into the quaint old garden behind. Then, opposite the parlour downstairs, was a bare-looking apartment full of shelves and closets, and known as “the master’s room.” It was there that Mr. Penrose, of olden days, had transacted

all his business, seen his people, and settled his accounts, and kept all his valuable deeds and papers.

Ruth had never been favoured with more than a cursory view of this sacred apartment. She had sometimes stood for a moment a step or two within the door, when sent by her aunt to summon her husband on particular occasions ; but she had never been invited to enter. Nor, if she had been, would she have cared much to profit by the permission.

It was with a strange feeling of trespassing on forbidden ground that Ruth that morning entered "the master's room," though it was all her own then. The papers were all cleared away, the chair in which the old man used to sit, fronting the door, and at the head of the green baize-covered table, was put away, but she recog-

nized it in a moment by the high-carved back—a most uncomfortable chair to select for constant use.

Ruth approached it with reverence, and seated herself there, the early morning sun glancing through the holes in the top of the shutters, which were not at that early hour unclosed for the day. Then, after a time, Ruth rose, and performed that office, and felt more at ease, and less in the presence of the departed, than she had done in that uncertain eerie light. There was a damp, earthy smell in the room, as if it had not been visited by much sunlight since the late occupant had departed.

Ruth glanced round with a slight degree of awe, then she passed her hand lingeringly over the old books which still stood on the open shelves ; the closet doors were all unlocked, and she reverently opened and

inspected all. There was nothing within—all was bare and silent; and then a chill came over her heart, as if the late master was still near and observing the motions of the new-comer.

“Poor Uncle Penrose,” thought she, “how many years he sat here, and thought, and toiled, and made money, and now it is all over. I wonder if he ever comes here now to revisit his old haunts! Well, as he has kindly left it all to me, I will not disturb his favourite room—he shall always find it the same. I will keep his room just as it is, in memory of both him and my aunt.”

Ruth’s mind was rather relieved when it had arrived at that conclusion, for, truth to say, she did not fancy that apartment at all. She was quite willing to shut it up, and leave it to be haunted, if necessary. She

would disturb nothing, and no one there.

Then she busied herself in looking out the nicest, prettiest room upstairs, to be converted into a sitting-room for her step-mother, when she was disposed to be alone. She even settled in her own mind how it was to be improved and new furnished. It seemed to Ruth a strangely extravagant plan, but for her mother, as she fondly called her, she thought she might venture. Nothing else was to be touched or changed—indeed she had some idea that there were stipulations to that effect in her aunt's will ; but let it be as it might, she was not disposed to contest the point, she was but too thankful and well satisfied with everything as it was, only determining to make such purchases and additions as might add to Mrs. Maxwell's pleasure and comfort in the room that was to be exclusively her own.

When the mother and step-daughter met at the breakfast-table the next morning, it was impossible for the former to be unmoved by the bright and happy looks which greeted her there. Mrs. Maxwell felt as if she had hardly known Ruth before, so many new and attractive qualities seemed springing up and revealing themselves under the magic touch of prosperity. That which debases a low cast of mind, turned upon its own gratifications, only elevates a higher and purer one, seeking the happiness of others as its chiefest good and gain. Ruth had been very patient in adverse circumstances, and very desirous of doing all she could to lighten the burden of others; but that was all she had to bestow, her labour and her love, and those, though lavishly bestowed, were tendered in so undemonstrative a manner as to have been in some sort disre-



garded, or taken as matter of course. Now, at last, it fell to Ruth's lot to possess the power of distributing good in her own household, and to be able to confer real tangible benefits and kindnesses. But in all that Ruth proposed that morning, in the first flush of her prosperity, there was the same dutiful deference to her step-mother's wishes, even waiting for the expression of them before hazarding her own ; just as she had ever done in the early days of her most dependent childhood.

It was the same, too, in making all the needful household arrangements. Ruth showed the nicest tact and delicacy in consulting her step-mother, or rather only suggesting, whilst she waited for Mrs. Maxwell's approval or decision. Ruth in no way took upon herself to play the hostess, but seemed to look upon all she possessed as the joint

property of herself and her step-mother ; only retaining the one delightful privilege of ordering those comforts and luxuries for her which Ruth knew she would never think of for herself. There was something very soothing and re-assuring to the lonely woman in receiving all these proofs of redoubled tenderness from her stepchild, and while she cared little for the comforts thus heaped upon her, she knew the workings of the human heart, at least of that which beat in Ruth's bosom, far too well to reject or seem to despise them. She was aware that in accepting all that was offered, without appearing to regard it as a gift, she gave Ruth the greatest pleasure she could enjoy.

Mrs. Maxwell was perhaps the more eager to do so, as she was conscious that her own feelings were straying far away—that her chief interest was no longer in Ruth, or in

Ruth's small surroundings. Her rebellious heart was yearning for the home—now so near—of her early married life, far more than towards that of the child of her love and adoption ; for those children whom God Himself had given to her, with all her former rights and privileges (now, alas ! forfeited), those on whom all her young maternal love had been so fondly, freely lavished ! Those rights had been long wrested from her, and her deep affection trampled on and ignored, but never extinguished. She felt they were still *her* children, whilst she was unalterably their mother, and filling to them that one relation in life which none other in this world could do.

Whilst indulging in these reflections, so exclusively her own, she in some degree innocently played the part of a dissembler. For it was certain that whilst Ruth's whole

thoughts and cares tended towards her step-mother, she herself for the time being occupied but little space in her step-mother's wandering thoughts. Mrs. Maxwell was satisfied to be passive in Ruth's hands, and to make the girl happy in acquiescing in all her projects for her own comfort, caring, oh! how little, about it all, in comparison with those interests of more vivid moment that were gaining hourly greater force in her mind.

Thus, then, in answer more to Ruth's looks of interrogation than to her spoken words, she put all questions at rest with—

“I really can hardly say what I should like best, dear. Everything is so nice and pretty here—so different from all I have lately been used to. I had much rather you settled everything for me. You know almost better than I do what suits me best, and I feel so tired and stupid that it will

be quite a relief and luxury to look on, and have nothing to do but to enjoy."

And with that reply Ruth was well satisfied, for it seemed to delegate to her hands the power she really possessed, and also to sanction her employing it in the way most grateful to her feelings.

In the course of that first afternoon, whilst Ruth was in the full bustle of all her initiatory proceeding, she was called from her occupations at the top of the house, to be informed by her tidy parlour-maid that Mr. Penrose was waiting below, to know if it was convenient to Miss Maxwell to see him that evening, or should he call the next day? It was on the tip of Ruth's tongue to exclaim, "How tiresome! Pray ask him to come to-morrow, I am so busy now!" But, early used to self-restraint, she suppressed the un-

civil speech, and replied, with as much suavity as she could command,

“Pray tell Mr. Penrose I will be down in a moment; and show him into the little parlour, Lucy, and let Mrs. Maxwell know. She is in her own room, but may like to go down and see him.”

So Lucy sped away, and gave her messages; but Mrs. Maxwell had no intention of profiting by that delivered to her. She thought it would savour too much of intrusion to present herself on the occasion, and thought it quite reasonable that Mr. Penrose might desire to have an interview with Ruth unfettered by the presence of any third person. She looked upon him as he truly was, the whole and sole guardian of her step-daughter's property, and almost of her person also—for should Ruth transgress any of the clauses enumerated in her aunt's

will, it was John Penrose who could step in and convict her.

Ruth had meanwhile taken the trouble to go to her own room and brush her abundant hair, removing some of the signs of her late occupation, make herself as tidy as the occasion demanded, for this first interview with her co-heir and trustee. Her natural good sense and feeling had suggested that it was unjust and unreasonable in her to entertain any ill-will against Mr. Penrose, because he had been placed in a position of trust as regarded herself, by her own and his late relations. She was aware he might make himself very disagreeable to her, situated as they were together.

But it would be bad taste in her to provoke the sentiment by giving herself unnecessary airs, and Mr. Penrose needless trouble. So far her night's reflections and

her morning's retrospections had seemed to lead her mind in the right direction; and under these influences she made as much haste as she could to meet and greet the visitor, who awaited her in the little parlour downstairs. When Ruth entered the room Mr. Penrose was standing at a window, busily engaged in looking over a paper which he folded, and deliberately returned to his pocket, as he heard the door open, and saw Ruth advance.

She held out her hand, and as he took it for a moment, and then dropped it almost instantaneously, she said,

"I hope I have not kept you waiting. I was busy upstairs, and"—with a half laugh and blush—"and too untidy to receive visitors as I was."

Ruth's candid confession was received



with an answering half-smile from the young man as he answered,

"Yes, no doubt you were busy. I can understand that, for I am a man of business myself, as you know ; so if you had sent me away, I could have come to-morrow, without any inconvenience to myself ; and I will do so now, if you prefer it."

"Thank you, no. You want, I daresay, to speak to me of business, so I will not lose your time, and I am quite ready to listen to anything now."

Mr. Penrose looked rather amused at the frankness with which Miss Maxwell met his introduction of himself in the capacity of a sort of legal adviser and business-to-be-discussed acquaintance. However, it saved him all trouble ; there were no preliminary speeches to be gone through, or explanations to make, which might be

embarrassing to either, as shewing how completely she was left in John Penrose's power, should she tread or swerve ever so little to the right or left of the rigid line by which she was to hold the possessions she had already begun to rate very highly.

They sat down and began the discussion for which Mr. Penrose came prepared. He laid before Ruth the sum and substance of her aunt and his uncle's will. She understood it all pretty clearly before, so there was not much to detail, except as to the yearly sum which she was to receive through his hands.

"You understand, Miss Maxwell, that every quarter you are to receive from me—of course it is all your own—but you know I am a banker, as well as brewer, and all our, I mean your money, is to remain in the bank, and to be paid to you in quarterly payments of two hundred a year."

Ruth comprehended it all, and gave her trustee as little trouble as possible. So the interview was not very wearying to either, and they parted tolerable friends.

## CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Ruth and her step-mother met soon after at dinner, Ruth laughingly reproached Mrs. Maxwell for having left her quite alone to go through her first legal interview, and make the acquaintance of her somewhat formidable guardian.

“But tell me, dear, how you like him, now you have met to discuss matters which must bring you, in some degree, on terms of intimacy. Is this Mr. Penrose a pleasant man to meet on such a footing? We had such a glimpse of him last night that all I could see was that he was a tolerably good-

looking and apparently gentleman-like young man, with an intelligent countenance and rather reserved manners."

"Well, mother, I do not think you would find cause to alter your first opinion as to the impression he made then. But it did not strike me that Mr. Penrose is really very reserved; his manner is quiet and very undemonstrative, but he entered into all my affairs as if he was a lawyer come to talk them over with me, and he did so without any backwardness or embarrassment. He says he is to pay us out of his bank—for he is a banker—two hundred pounds every quarter! Think of that, mamma!—more than we have had for some time a year, since——"

"Yes, dear, since we lost him who was our—everything, we have had barely more than my pittance—hardly a hundred a year.

Yes, it must be a great change for you, Ruth."

"Indeed it is. How thankful I am! And I have been thinking of the pony and little carriage we must have. I shall drive you out every day, mother; and then we must have a man to take care of both, and look after the garden and field."

"You seem to have thought of everything, Ruth dear," said Mrs. Maxwell, watching the bright, happy expression of Ruth's animated countenance, and half envying her the capacity of such enjoyment as she evidently experienced in the exercise of her new power. And then the lonely woman sighed as she thought, "He must have thought her very sweet and pretty."

Meanwhile, the object of her thoughts and inquiries was pursuing the even tenor of his quiet way after he left Miss Maxwell's

house, and walking through the town, made some calls of a business nature; then, altering his direction, he left the precincts of the town, and struck out into a path that led across some fields quite into the country. He did not proceed very far in that direction, for the fields led him by a short cut into a high road, and following that for a few yards, soon came in sight of an old-fashioned house that stood within its own grounds, but was approached through a gate that stood not many yards distant from the mansion itself.

There was no pretension about the place. It was by no means a large house, nor were the grounds of any extent. Still there was an air of unmistakeable comfort about the whole habitation and its surroundings. It was thoroughly well kept, the trees and shrubs had all a cared-for air, and the gar-

den, which was partly visible on one side, was resplendent, even at that late season, with every brilliant colour that could be collected together in the flowery department. The house was of red brick, most becomingly discoloured with age ; and the windows were all casements, but bright, and large, and cheerful-looking.

Mr. Penrose walked up to the porch, and rang the bell, which immediately responded in a deep, sonorous tone to the visitor's touch, and before it had tolled out its summons a servant appeared at the door. To the question, "Is Lady Cunliffe at home?" a speedy affirmative was returned, the man adding,

"My lady is in the garden, sir, if you like to walk in there; or shall I go and tell her you are here?"

"No, thank you, Stevens, I will not bring



Lady Cunliffe in. I shall find her soon, I daresay."

Mr. Penrose had not very far to walk before he discovered the object of his search not many yards from the house. The lady sought by the young man was not of a form to make walking a very suitable or pleasurable occupation; neither was the general costume or appearance of the said lady such as young men like Mr. Penrose are wont to seek for in those with whom they desire the enjoyment of a sweet Summer's evening stroll in such a beautiful garden as that in which this meeting occurred. Lady Cunliffe looked round on hearing the approaching steps, and with a beaming smile welcomed her visitor. It was a good-natured face that was displayed, but belonging to one who was of no uncertain age. Indeed Lady Cunliffe never desired to be

thought any age but that which her baptismal register proclaimed her ; although her style of dress might have given a different impression to anyone seeing the lady for the first time. The love of bright colours displayed in her garden seemed to be extended to a rival display on her own person ; and certainly Lady Cunliffe's rotund figure, and moon-like face, which was sallow in complexion, with small dark bead-like eyes, did not set off her gay attire to much advantage.

She was, when Mr. Penrose approached, sauntering slowly down a grass terrace, on which stood ornamental vases, with brilliantly tinted exotic plants ; and apparently gazing with fond admiration on their many-coloured hues of varied loveliness. She was not alone, for she leant, with no little weight, on the arm of another lady, who in person and general physique afforded as strange a con-

trast to her own ball-like figure as could well be imagined.

Miss Wheeler, Lady Cunliffe's companion, was tall and thin, with a care-worn countenance, which might have been good-looking in former days, but was now only remarkable for its expression of cold apathetic indifference as regarded things and persons in general. She seemed, however, to be regarded with perfect toleration by her good-natured patroness. Lady Cunliffe had been twice married in India—first to an English officer, and afterwards to an Indian judge. She had lived but little in England since her widowhood, and was rather a novice in English society. Her acquaintance with Mr. Penrose did not date above a year back, when they met at Baden, and became—thanks to the lady's unceremonious cordiality and other circumstances—rather more

intimate than the length of their acquaintance and difference of age seemed to render likely. Lady Cunliffe extended a plump little hand, ungloved and covered with gems of unusual brightness; then, smiling with peculiar complacency, observed:

“I have been expecting you all the morning. Well! what news do you bring?”

Mr. Penrose glanced in the direction of the companion, and replied:

“Nothing beyond the bare fact of an arrival, and consequent bustle of settling.”

“Well, but you were not in a bustle too, I suppose; so I suppose you can relate your general impressions?”

Then, as Mr. Penrose still hesitated, and again looked at Miss Wheeler, Lady Cunliffe exclaimed,

“Oh! it's Sophy you are thinking of! Never mind her; she won't be jealous—at

least, I hope not—if you praise my niece ever so much, nor shall I be greatly hurt or distressed if you do not see cause to do so. My feelings are at present in a very neutral state. My poor sister's child is a perfect stranger to me."

"Yes, I am quite aware of that; but it is to be hoped you will soon become acquainted now."

"You advise me?"

Mr. Penrose smiled—he rarely laughed.

"Yes, certainly, if you require any advice on such a subject."

"Well, you know Miss Maxwell, and I do not, and perhaps she may not like an old Indian aunt turning up so unexpectedly—eh?"

"If you really ask my opinion on that subject, I should say that in Miss Maxwell's case the acquisition of a near relative

must be a very pleasant event to her."

"Be the relation what she may? And many people do not like their near relations. I am sure I have found it so in the course of my many years' experience in this wicked world—happy you, Mr. Penrose, if the idea is new to you."

"And yet, Lady Cunliffe, you are anxious to hear of this young lady, because she is a near relative."

"Very true; but that is no reason that when I see her I shall like her, or she will like me—eh?"

"I think you may venture to make the experiment without any serious misgivings as to the results."

"Oh! that means, you do think her rather nice?"

"It is of more consequence what you think of Miss Maxwell than what I do."

"Of course it is; but I relied much on your opinion after you had seen her, and, it seems, you decline giving one."

"Well, I can fairly advise you to go and judge for yourself. As far as outward appearance goes, you can have no reason to be disappointed."

"Well, that is something like an opinion, and a favourable one, as far as it goes; but tell me, did you say anything about me? Will she expect me to call upon her?"

"As far as I know, she is not aware of your existence, and I left the pleasant task of announcing it to yourself."

Lady Cunliffe stopped in the midst of her slow walk towards the house, and looking up in Mr. Penrose's face, laughed merrily, her little eyes twinkling with mirth, as she repeated—

"Pleasant task of announcing it! Well,

I hope it will be pleasant. I only wish she had been a young man instead of a young lady; I always can get on so much better with them—I have been so much more used to them and their ways. If you had been *Miss* Penrose instead of Mr., I should never have become so well acquainted with you at Baden, or have heard anything of poor Mary's child. You are not her cousin, I suppose—only next door to it?"

"Our relationship certainly will not stand the test of any strict investigation, though her aunt was mine by marriage, and my uncle was hers in the same way."

"That will do—I see it all—connected, not related."

"Exactly."

"Well, come in and sit down. How tired I am with walking and talking!" said the lady, as she reached the door which



stood open into the garden, and led into a pretty, rather spacious drawing-room, where the mistress's taste for bright colouring and luxurious surroundings of every kind was amply displayed, especially in the variety of easy and curiously-shaped lounging-chairs and couches of all descriptions, with their brilliant and costly coverings of different kinds. A large fire burnt on a low, wide hearth, which, with the open door and windows, made a pleasant atmosphere in the comfortable-looking apartment. There were large and handsome Indian screens, placed so as to temper both the heat from the fire and the draught from the windows. It was within a cozy nook formed by one of these screens, and upon an inviting-looking couch placed there, that the lady of the house hastened to bestow her plump person; and then calling to Miss Wheeler to fetch her

an eider-down *couvre-pied*, and to place two or three cushions, with a view to her especial comfort, she told her she must be tired of toddling all the morning about with her, and she had better go and amuse herself till dinner time.

“And now, my good friend,” said the lady, as she threw herself back with a sigh of relief on to her luxurious couch, “tell me more of my new relation. I have sent Sophy away for the time being.”

“What do you particularly wish to know, Lady Cunliffe? I think I told you all I can upon so very short an acquaintance with Miss Maxwell. She is good-looking and lady-like, and apparently well-disposed, but I can only vouch in reality for her good face and figure.”

“How wonderfully precise and particular you are, *mon ami*! I want you to tell me

something of her relations with that other lady—her step-mother.”

“I only saw them together for a moment, when they arrived the first evening, and when it was very evident they could both have dispensed with my company. From the little I saw, I imagine they are on very good terms together.”

“It looks like it—their coming here together; but I want to know if the Beaumonts are likely to welcome their new relations.”

Mr. Penrose’s countenance clouded over a little as he answered,

“I can tell you nothing on that subject. Louis Beaumont is the most reserved man breathing.”

“But you know him intimately.”

“Yes; strange to say, we are intimate in a way; but you know our acquaintance was

made abroad, where intimacy, like fruits and flowers, ripens and expands more quickly than in our cold, capricious climate. Yes, we became tolerably intimate during an excursion, when we first met on the Alps."

"And Mr. Beaumont discovered you were the better mountaineer of the two?" laughed the recumbent lady.

"Perhaps so—but I was two years his senior, and had in that time gained the experience he lacked."

"Well! and he never spoke to you of his mother?"

"Never at that time or since."

"And his sister, that handsome girl I saw at Baden, has she no maternal longings?"

"Indeed I cannot tell you, Lady Cunliffe, for she never confided them to me. And now I must say good-bye. I have an engagement."

## CHAPTER IX.

THE lady of the "Bower" (for so was Lady Cunliffe's house called) remained for some time after the departure of her visitor plunged in a profound reverie, till she was roused by the entrance of her companion, who stood by the side of the sofa, quietly remarking,

"So you are not dressed yet, Lady Cunliffe, and the bell must have rung half an hour ago. Dinner must be quite ready."

"Dear me, did it? I never heard it! Dinner's always ready, I think."

"That is lucky for those who are ready for it," said Miss Wheeler.

“Meaning you are hungry. Goodness, Sophy, how I envy you! I wish I was hungry!—but I never am, unless it so happens by chance that I can get nothing to eat—at least, nothing I care about.”

“Well, that is not likely to be the case in your own house, unless you wait till everything is spoilt, and then that may chance to give you an appetite, as well as increase mine.”

Lady Cunliffe laughed good-naturedly, and then said,

“I have half a mind not to dress to-day, only that will offend Mademoiselle Zoe; and if I do, I shall spoil the dinner, and affront Monsieur le Maître.”

“Well, your choice is between two evils, so I would choose the lesser—don’t dress to-day; and let me ring and order dinner at once.”

Lady Cunliffe, however, decided on a compromise between the two propositions, and, after a slight change of toilet, the *recherché* repast was served without delay, and all parties propitiated. When the lady and her companion were alone over the dessert, Lady Cunliffe began to unburden her mind of the various thoughts that had been conflicting there ever since her interview with Mr. Penrose. She was quite aware she had not a very sympathising auditor; still it was better to talk to a living, breathing figure than to herself, and Lady Cunliffe was eminently sociable—she liked to communicate her own sentiments, and, if possible, elicit those of others. So she began, rather incoherently,

“I cannot make out what made him run away in such a hurry.”

“A hurry!” repeated Miss Wheeler, in an

accent of surprise—"why, I thought Mr. Penrose would never go! He was here more than an hour. I saw him walk down the road, and of course supposed you would go and dress then."

"No—I forgot all about dressing, and dinner, and everything. I was wondering why Mr. Penrose started off the moment I began to ask about Miss Beaumont."

"Perhaps he is in love with her, and was afraid you would find it out."

"No!—do you think so? I never thought of that—indeed, I had something else in my mind—but never mind that—what do you think of my niece, Sophy?"

"I never heard of Miss Maxwell's existence till a week ago," replied her companion, with a stony countenance.

Lady Cunliffe glanced quickly into Miss Wheeler's face, then smiled at what she



saw, or fancied she saw there as she continued—

“But you are likely to hear a great deal more for the future, Sophy Wheeler.”

“Yes, I suppose so. How hot the fire is!” said the lady, in reply, pushing her chair back rather abruptly.

“Well, then, we will go into the next room,” observed her patroness, changing the room, but not the subject, as she said, “It is very strange that I should never have had any tidings of poor Mary’s child till I made the acquaintance of this Mr. Penrose at Baden last year, and he told me of his connexion with the Maxwells. You know Mary, my younger sister, married an army-surgeon of that name, but I was older, and married at the time. I never saw her husband; and as she died the following year, and Mr. Maxwell went to England,

and took the baby with him, we quite lost sight of them all; and we heard that Kenneth Maxwell soon after made a great match, and cut all his old friends and relations."

"Perhaps they cut him," replied Miss Wheeler—"things are often so misrepresented."

"You need not tell me that, Sophy; but I was quite out of the way of hearing anything about the business till, as it chanced at Baden-Baden last year, I lighted both on the Beaumonts and Mr. John Penrose, whose uncle married Kenneth Maxwell's only sister."

"And, as far as I understand matters, this uncle or aunt has left Miss Maxwell a great heiress? That was what I understood when I just heard the subject discussed about a week ago. How strange she should

come to the very place where you are settled !”

“Not at all. For, though I said nothing about it at the time, I acted on a hint Mr. Penrose gave me at Baden, that she was likely to come into some property here ; but he is so cautious, he never spoke openly on the subject till about a week ago.”

“I suppose he thought something might happen betwixt this and then. But what have the Beaumonts to do with the matter ?” asked her companion, roused to an unwonted degree of interest in her patroness’s communication.

“Oh ! don’t you know it was Mr. Beaumont’s mother who married Mr. Maxwell, and mortally offended her first husband’s family in so doing.”

“Then I was right—it *was* Mr. Maxwell who was cut, and not he who discarded all

his relations," observed Miss Wheeler, in an accent of stony satisfaction.

"Yes, that is, or was, the state of the case, I suppose. But now, what must we do about my niece?"

"Go and see her, in the first place," answered Miss Sophy; adding—"I do not see anything else to be done, or what there is to perplex you on the occasion."

Lady Cunliffe made no reply for a minute or two, and just rose from the easy-chair in which she had ensconced herself; then took a turn or two up and down the room, and finally came and stood opposite to Miss Wheeler, who raised her eyes from her work, whilst her patroness said,

"Of course I mean to go and see my niece, but it is natural I should wish to hear what she is like first."

"I should think you were more likely to

arrive at that conclusion by seeing her yourself than trusting to the report of others."

"You are right, Sophy ; we will go to-morrow. Now give me some music before I go to bed—one of Mendelssohn's songs without words."

The obedient companion arose at that bidding, and it was almost startling and strange to hear the exquisite music that proceeded from those rigid-looking fingers and those stony lips. Who could believe those thrilling accents could be born of them—or of the soul that dwelt within ! For a brief half hour Sophy Wheeler was a changed creature—all harmony, and pathos, and sweetness ; the very expression of her countenance became changed, all its dulness and apathy had vanished as if by magic, and you felt you were in the presence of one

gifted with a great talent. Suddenly the sounds ceased, for Lady Cunliffe, spite of her almost passionate love of music, had begun to mingle the sweet sounds with her shadowy visions; her head had fallen back on the soft cushions, her eyes were closed, and though a smile still lingered on her lips, it was evident that she slept.

The little noise of rising and closing the piano roused the lady from her light slumbers, and she exclaimed, on seeing Miss Wheeler walking across the room to a side-table, where the bed-candlesticks were placed,

“What, tired already, Sophy?”

“Not sooner than you, Lady Cunliffe,” replied the companion, with a half-smile; adding, “But it is really time to go to sleep in earnest, so let me light your candle, and ring for Zoe.”

To that proposition, which appeared to be the usual programme at that time of night, there was no opposition, and the lady of the Bower and her companion each sought their separate apartments. Lady Cunliffe's was, as may be supposed, a very luxurious one, well furnished, and supplied with every costly appendage that her foreign, as well as English, experience deemed essential to her comfort and convenience; and there, for the present, we may leave her to sleep on, and wander undisturbed in that mystic and unapproachable land of dreams into which she speedily entered.

Scarcely less luxurious was that other apartment, only a few doors distant, where Lady Cunliffe's companion and musical protégée sought her repose also that same night. But very different were the reveries of the

two women who had just parted, and who for the last ten years had been passing their lives together. Miss Wheeler entered her room with an expression of dreary disgust upon her face, relieved a moment after by one of apathetic weariness. She approached her toilet-table with an air of languid indifference, and lighted the two tall candles which, in their silver state, stood on each side of the large mirror, which at that moment reflected the figure and face of the woman so employed. As she bent forward to adjust something—a rose in water—on the table, she glanced upwards, and caught the reflection of her own soured and discontented countenance. At that sight she dashed the flower from the vase, where she had carefully placed it, saying, in a low, muttering tone,

“Faded!—faded! Why should it be



preserved? All its beauty, and freshness, and sweetness is gone; far better to let it perish thus than try and keep it alive in that gilded vase, to die a more lingering death. And yet," she added, as she sat down, and looked more steadily on her self in the glass—"that poor flower is not half so faded before its time as that miserable face! How could it have been pretty once?—and how could its possessor have been loved and cared for on account of its freshness and attractiveness? Sophy Wheeler, you must be dreaming, surely, and all those recollections must belong to some other person, or to some former existence! I wonder what truth there is in the philosophy which counts such dreams as realities? It is rather a pleasant conceit, at all events, only when I pass into my next existence; under whatever form it

should be developed, I should like to retain sufficient recollection of my former self to have the satisfaction of comparing my experiences, and deriving some benefit or comfort from their relative degrees of good and evil ! Heigh-ho ! I wonder what this new whim of a niece will turn out ? My lady is so indolent that I see she already dreads the excitement of a meeting, with all the family retrospections that it will entail. And yet the poor woman is too tender-hearted at bottom not to be prepared to go through any fuss and fatigue consequent on so interesting an occasion. I wonder what Mr. Penrose thinks of it all ? She took the trouble of assuring him that I should not be jealous if he praised Miss Maxwell ever so much ! It was kind of her to vouch for any amiable feelings on my part. Well, we shall see !"

And then this low-toned soliloquy came abruptly to an end, as a sharp little rap was heard at Miss Wheeler's door, and upon the accustomed "*entrez*," a voice said,

"Can I do anything for Mademoiselle? Madame dort——"

"What, asleep already? Yes; come in, Zoe, and brush my hair. I like to be waited on, as you know."

"Then, comfortably establishing herself in an easy-chair, with her white *peignoir* wrapped around her, Sophy Wheeler loosened her still abundant, long, dark hair, and submitted it to the dexterous hands of the clever and good-natured Frenchwouan, who, for the sake of a prolonged chat in her native tongue with her lady's companion, was perfectly willing, at occasional times and seasons, to tender her ready assistance; and thus occupied, we will leave them for the present.

Meanwhile, during that eventful first day of possession to Ruth Maxwell, no whisper, however remote, had reached her of a relation waiting with impatience to become acquainted with her sister's only child. Her step-mother had indeed vaguely suggested that when she became prosperous, and to a certain extent wealthy, possibly unheard-of relations might spring to light, and claim a place in her kind recollection.

Mrs. Maxwell, however, only spoke at random. She had never heard her second husband speak of his girl-wife, whom he had wedded and lost so early. By the same instinct Mrs. Maxwell never reverted to her years of first married life. She was well-contented to adopt as her own the little girl who was too young to remember her own mother, and who clung so lovingly to herself. She and her husband were all the

world to each other, and from the day they had married they seemed content to ignore that they had either of them ever lived or loved until that day. Mrs. Maxwell's entire rejection by her first husband's family, and the deprivation of her children, had served to strengthen the bands that united her to her second husband, making her so entirely dependent on his love and protection. If her idle words could have had any latent signification, it might have been in reference to the Penrose family, which, although not related, stood naturally in the light of connections; and she might possibly have supposed that there might be other members, besides the John Penrose so conspicuously and unpleasantly mixed up in all Ruth's present and future proceedings.

Mrs. Maxwell might also have felt the possibility of some horde of Scotch cousins,

of whose existence she, in her state of poverty, had never heard, but whose recollections and cousinly instincts might be quickened and brought to light by the rumour of her step-daughter's prosperity and possessions. Such, however, had not proved the case in the first interview which had already taken place with Mr. Penrose. He had confined himself entirely to plain matter-of-fact business. Neither he nor Ruth had made any more advance towards intimacy, or even acquaintanceship, than if he had been the lawyer *pur et simple*, without any admixture of the friend and relation, which Ruth was only too ready and well-pleased to acknowledge, in speaking of his visit to her step-mother. It is very certain that Mr. Penrose, on that occasion, made no mention of the aunt then hovering in the background, and ready and

even eager to claim her relationship, as soon as she should hear his report and receive the certain amount of encouragement for which it must be confessed Lady Cunliffe was looking rather nervously. She longed to seek her sister Mary's child, and yet she feared that child might say, "You never sought me when I was poor and wanted friends, and now I am rich and independent, you wish to claim me almost as a child of your own!"

It was very true that Lady Cunliffe could answer—she had passed many, many years of her life in India, and had never received the slightest intimation that her sister's child was living. She had had other sisters—two had married and died, and left no living children, and one to whom she had been greatly attached had died in early youth. She had fancied herself left quite alone in

the world, and, it was supposed, had partly adopted a girl, who originally came to her as companion, and was the daughter of an officer and friend of her first husband, who had hastily married a girl who came out to India for that purpose, and who had previously been on the stage. She was rather pretty, with a fine voice; but it was an ill-assorted union. She left him, and died early, whilst her little girl was left to be brought up as she might be. Her father sent her to a foreign school, and after some time left her an uncared-for orphan, to fight the hard battle of life with nothing but a certain amount of talent and good looks.

After a time it happened, under peculiar circumstances, that Miss Wheeler crossed Lady Cunliffe's path, who, knowing all her family history, took her into safe keeping,



providing her with a home; and with her Sophy had been contented, *faute de mieux*, to pass the last ten years of her life.

## CHAPTER X.

IT was the morning after his visit to the "Bower" that Mr. Penrose paid another visit in a different direction. It was to Harewood Park, where he had an engagement to shoot and to dine afterwards. He went early, and found the party in the house still assembled in the breakfast-room. Mrs. Nelson was seated at the head of the table as tea-maker, a post Maude Beaumont was but too happy to cede to her, though on other occasions she took the head of her brother's table. On the morning in question, though breakfast seemed for the most

part over, there were little groups of talkers scattered over the spacious apartment, some still lingering by the table, though their occupation there was gone. There were no lady guests, only those of the family being present, but several gentlemen, who were either staying in the house, or who, like Mr. Penrose, were invited for shooting that morning.

The new-comer received a very cordial welcome, not only from the master of the house, but also from all present; for Mr. Penrose was well-known and generally liked in that neighbourhood. Although he was a brewer as well as a banker, it did not seem to militate against his social position, for he had the reputation of being very rich, and had tact and talent enough to make his way in any society into which his fate might lead him. On the present occasion, after

exchanging a few words with Mr. Beaumont and some of the men who were in the room, he sought a vacant chair which happened to be placed within easy reach of the two young ladies of the house, who were talking with some animation to a middle-aged gentleman who stood before them in a listening attitude, and at last remarked,

“ Well, of course a story loses nothing in passing through half a dozen mouths; but it seems there has not been quite as much exaggeration as usual in the present case.”

“ It could hardly have been made worse than it was!” said Miss Powys.

“ I think it might,” replied Miss Beaumont, with a slight shudder, adding, “ Only think, Gwen, if that brave girl had not been at hand, what would have become of you?”

“ Oh! perhaps some one else would have come to the rescue. There were plenty of

porters or people of some sort about waiting the arrival of the train."

"We cannot answer for what might have been; we only know what was, and that was, Miss Powys was in great danger, and a wonderful young lady stepped in, and, it appears, rescued her out of it, at great peril to herself. So all Miss Powys's friends are bound to feel grateful to this young lady for evermore. But where is she, and who can she be?"

"Ah! that is just what we want to know; and if you, Sir Digby, could help us to trace this brave girl, Gwen and I shall be eternally obliged to you."

Sir Digby Ferrers glanced up quickly into the animated face of Maude Beaumont as she said this, and, despite of his five and forty years, looked as if he would have ventured much to secure the promised

guerdon ; but he answered quietly enough,

“ Cannot you give me any clue whereby to trace the lady ? I suppose, Miss Powys, you were not in a state to make many observations yourself after your adventure ? ”

“ I should think not ; but, though I was much more frightened than hurt, I am afraid I was too self-engrossed to have many thoughts except for my own preservation ; besides, it was too dark to be able to distinguish anything very correctly, and that was the cause of it all.”

“ What, the darkness ? ”

“ Yes, if it had not been so dark I should never have been so stupid as to miss my footing ; and, if it had not been for that, I should have had some clearer ideas respecting my friend in need. But I dare say Maude observed her ? ”

"Only for a moment. I just saw a tall girl, with a pale, frightened face, helping to support you into the waiting-room ; but my thoughts were quite bewildered, and before I could at all understand the state of affairs, she had vanished. But Louis went after her, and saw her, he said, just as the train was starting. Oh ! come here, Louis, and tell Sir Digby all about our adventure the other night."

Mr. Beaumont at that moment had sauntered near, and the two girls appealed to him as to the impression produced by the slight glimpse he had had of the young lady to whom they all owed so much.

"I am sorry to say I was too late to say more than a very few words. I just saw the young lady and an elderly one—her mother probably—get into the train ; and though I hurried after them, it was the barest ghost

of a speech I could find time to make before they were off."

"But you saw the lady, Beaumont?" asked Mr. Penrose from the background, where he had been sitting, an attentive auditor, and from whence he had addressed a few questions for his own especial benefit, although a casual meeting the day before had put him in possession of the leading facts of Gwendoline's adventure at the railway station the preceding evening.

"Yes, I saw her by lamplight, so you must not expect a very accurate or detailed account of either the young or the old lady's appearance, as they sat in the carriage and exchanged a few words with me in answer to my acknowledgments, just as the train was beginning to move on."

"But you would know her again, Louis?" asked his sister.



"Perhaps I might, perhaps I might not," replied the young man, evasively; "and I do not see much chance of meeting them again—they were evidently strangers on a journey, and have passed on their way."

"I don't see that at all," said Miss Powys. "One is always meeting people over and over again when one least expects. Don't you remember that queer family, Maude, we were always falling in with abroad, and and then one day we met them at the top of Cader Idris, in Wales?"

"Oh! yes, I remember; and yet we never knew who they were, or whence they came, or whither they were going, and yet we seemed quite well acquainted," replied Maude, laughing.

"Yes, we were fated to meet, it seems; and so, no doubt, if the fates decree it, we shall fall in again with my young lady. I

can't help fancying she is something or other of a fate to me, by the strange chance that brought us together so luckily for me. Oh! yes, I daresay we shall meet in due time again. What do you think, Mr. Penrose?" said Gwendoline, suddenly addressing him.

"That it is quite time we should be moving, Miss Powys—it is getting late; and——"

"And you are tired of hearing the story of my wonderful escape—is it not so, Mr. Penrose?"

"You forget I heard something of it before, so I have exhausted all the first freshness of my feelings on the occasion."

"Well, it was new, at all events, to Sir Digby; and he seemed to consider it a very thrilling tale; but you need not have come and listened to it over again, Mr. Penrose,

if you are so tired of hearing all about it."

"No, I was not tired—I was only waiting till you had finished, to tell you I have half an idea as to who the lady probably is ; but I am not quite sure, so please do not proclaim the fact until I am more certain."

Mr. Penrose lowered his voice at the conclusion of his sentence, as if he wished to confide his supposition to Miss Powys's ears alone ; and it happened that no one else heard him but her—the rest of the party were moving off, the men taking up their hats, and putting on their gloves, and following their host, who was already leaving the room.

Sir Digby Ferrers still lingered by Miss Beaumont, his ostensible object seeming to be to persuade her to come with the luncheon that was ordered, to meet the shooters at an appointed spot."

"Do come," Miss Beaumont," pleaded he, *en partant*; "we shall be awfully disappointed if you fail, as I think you half promised on the occasion."

"Well, I shall come, perhaps, as Louis makes such a point of it; but Gwen and I wanted to go in another direction this morning."

"Can't you do both?"

"I fear not; but I won't disappoint—Louis."

"Ah! I did hope you were going to say——"

"What?" asked the girl, innocently; adding, in an indifferent tone—"But you will be quite too late, Sir Digby; and I have told you that you will very likely see us with the luncheon."

"Then I will ask no more, at present, and look forward to two o'clock."

And with a slight bow to Mrs. Nelson, Sir Digby Ferrers took himself out of the room. As the door closed upon him, Gwendoline looked towards her cousin and laughed.

"He is getting very desperate, Maude."

"Is he?" replied Maude.

"Indeed he is," said Gwendoline, more earnestly; adding—"I could not help observing him, and—and—I am quite sure, Maude, it will be your own fault if you are not the lady of Ferrers Abbey within a very short time."

"Well, Gwen, you have left out the principal item."

"What do you mean, Maude?"

"Of course you know I mean you can marry Sir Digby Ferrers any day you like."

"What! a man old enough to be my father?"

"If *you* don't object to that, I do not see that anyone else can. Besides, he would be a young papa with grown-up daughters."

"Not at all ; and I do wish, Gwen, you would not be so anxious to provide me with a husband, or rather an estate, as I am sure, in this case, it is that fine place of Sir Digby's that you consider the most eligible part of the match you have concocted."

"I did not concoct it, as you call it, Maude. Sir Digby is evidently paying you great attention, and you seem to like talking to him very well."

"And why should I not 'talk' to any man, young or old, who comes to my brother's house, without being suspected of having designs on his place or himself?"

"Now, Maudie, I can't talk to you when once you mount your high horse in that way. You know I am no match in conver-

sation with you on those occasions, but I only know what I know, and see what I see, and think——”

“A good deal of nonsense, my dearest cousin,” replied Maude, laughing. “So now, please, leave Sir Digby to his own devices, and me in the full enjoyment of the freedom I prize so highly; and come and practise some of those new duets that came yesterday evening, for I am all impatience to try them.”

Gwendoline Powys rose with something like a sigh from the easy couch where she had thrown herself after the gentlemen's departure, but followed obediently in her cousin's wake, as it had always been her custom from earliest childhood to do; and giving up her intended occupation that morning, did as she was desired, for Gwendoline was all softness and sweetness, though

sometimes a little capricious and fanciful, as became so petted and perfect a creature. She was by nature bright and lively, though her spirits had suffered severely from her home sorrows and trials, yet she was at that time nearly restored to her usual cheerfulness and powers of enjoyment.

Maude Beaumont's character, like her external form, was cast in a firmer, stronger mould than that of her more fragile cousin. There were certain qualities which lay as yet almost undeveloped, possibly tending either to good or evil, as the varied casualties of life might bring them into exercise. Still it must be acknowledged that Maude, with some little defects both of temper and training, was a very fascinating person. Her strong affection for Gwendoline was blended with a degree of almost motherly love and care, that was very touching in its



manifestation at times. That Gwendoline should be her sister as well as cousin, was as much the desire of one girl as of the other. Miss Powys, indeed, never doubted for a moment that she was the destined as well as chosen wife of her cousin Louis. Perhaps the sentiment was the stronger on her part, as it had only sprung into existence within the last two years of her orphanage. Those all-important years had brought her near in every way to her charming cousin. And it was in the course of them that his whole bearing towards her had so changed. From the indifference with which in his young manhood he had looked upon his little cousin (not more than a child to him), he had suddenly awoke into a perception of her exceeding beauty and sweetness; and what was more, of her entire dependence upon himself. He was her appointed guard-

ian, her protector ; and how could he fail at his age, under such circumstances, to be in some sort her lover also ? Gwendoline had given her whole heart to her cousin. She knew that she was beautiful—that she was rich—that she was an object of general love and admiration ; and she rejoiced in the knowledge, because she thought she was so much more worthy of her cousin Louis. She never dreamt of flirting or finding pleasure in the devotion of others—for she believed that Louis loved her ; he had never asked her to be his wife, but there was plenty of time for that, and she fancied he loved and preferred her to all the world. Yes, even to his sister Maude, for he sometimes found fault with her independence of opinion, and a certain tone of haughtiness which was natural to her, and so different from the yielding sweetness of Gwendoline's temper, which

never galled him by word or deed ; and was indeed the model of that womanly loveliness which he always extolled so much, and desired to see Maude imitate.

It may be said in a passing word, in regard to Mr. Beaumont himself, that his own disposition was very similar to his sister's, in many respects, but though genuine and true by nature, he was less open to conviction than she was. Still the brother and sister were, in their respective ways, much attached to each other ; Maude on her part believing in her brother with a blind and devoted partiality that made her ignore any shortcomings on his side ; whilst he accepted the worship of the two girls, almost ignoring its extent, and never attempting to analyze its quality.

## CHAPTER XI.

**I**T was not very long before Ruth Maxwell was enlightened as to her existing relationship with Lady Cunliffe. A very few days had elapsed since their arrival, before Ruth and her step-mother began to settle down in their new abode, and feel themselves at home there. Mrs. Maxwell, too, was much calmer in spirit than when she first came. The perturbation of her mind had given place to a sort of uneasy resignation. It was the feeling of waiting for what coming events might have in store for her. The future was no longer wholly blank. There were two living forms

and figures that stood out with a marked prominence from the shadowy cloud which surrounded them. And yet though both the faces and figures were veiled from her anxious gaze, she knew they were those of her living, breathing children. No airy spectres, but veritable human beings, as near and almost as dear as those whose once living faces she could recall at will, but who now lay slumbering in their quiet graves in a distant land. And yet these ever-present but unseen and unknown forms and faces were near to her—almost at her door. Oh! when should she see them in reality, and clasp them in her longing arms!

But of all this Ruth knew nothing—she observed no change in her step-mother; sometimes, when a rap came at their door, she would start up with an anxious, bewildered look, and Ruth would go up to

her and gently ask if she expected anyone; and then Mrs. Maxwell would reply, in a hurried manner—"Expect? Oh no! whom should I expect, Ruth? Never mind me, dear, coming here has unhinged me a little; but I shall expect no one to come and see me until I do see them." And then she would relapse into silence, or begin to talk on such indifferent subjects that Ruth felt she must ask no questions. Sometimes she thought it might be that her mother had some old acquaintances in that neighbourhood whom she wished to avoid, or else why start up with that scared look?

A few people came and left their cards, but there were no names familiar to Mrs. Maxwell, nor had she ever known much of any of the inhabitants of Castleford. The neighbouring county families did not, except in a few cases, visit in the town.

It was still early in the day, and before the usual visiting hour, when a handsomely-appointed carriage drove up to the front gate of Ruth's house, and a round, plump face looked rather curiously up at the dwelling out of the window; whilst an equally plump hand and arm gave a card, with sundry injunctions, to the footman who waited the lady's order.

Ruth and Mrs. Maxwell were upstairs in the morning-room appropriated to the latter, and the cheerful large casement window, built in a sort of projection which was carried up from over the porch, commanded a full view of all and everything that came to, or passed by, the house.

"Who can that be, mother?" asked Ruth, wonderingly, as she gazed from behind the curtain on the gay equipage stopping at her gates, and the equally gay-

looking lady who was delivering her card and message at the same time. Mrs. Maxwell was sitting at a little distance over the fire, and could not see out of the window without rising up, so she only heard Ruth's exclamation that there was a smart carriage stopping at their house, and a lady sending in a card and a message. At that news Mrs. Maxwell's heart beat wildly, for she had cherished, almost unconsciously, visions of her long-lost son and daughter coming to seek her, and imploring her to come home—back to her own old home with them.

Strange visions indeed!—and most unlikely ever to be realized, had they known even how near their mother was then to them. But they knew nothing of Mrs. Maxwell's arrival at Castleford, nor had she sought, in the remotest way, to make



herself known to them. She did not even know that Mr. Penrose, her only acquaintance there, was aware of, or even recollected if he *had* known her former name and family history. Still, with unreasoning impetuosity, did Mrs. Maxwell arrive at the conclusion that the gay equipage must be her daughter's—that she had heard of her, and had come to seek her and claim her love.

Whilst she revolved these things hastily in her mind she rose from her chair, but her limbs trembled so she was obliged to catch hold of the table for support; and whilst she did so, and before her trembling lips could utter the question that rose to them, she was rudely disillusioned; for Ruth, all unconscious of her step-mother's perturbation, and engrossed in her own observations, looked back laughing, and said,

"Oh! mother, it is such a funny-looking, little old lady! I have never seen her before. Do come here and look, and tell me if it is any old friend of yours."

"I have none here, Ruth, as I have told you before," replied Mrs. Maxwell, in a low harsh voice.

Ruth was, for the moment, too deeply engaged in her observations to notice anything peculiar in Mrs. Maxwell's voice or manner; and a moment afterwards the maid entered the room bearing the card, on which was neatly inscribed—"Lady Cunliffe," and, in one corner, the name of her place of abode, also proclaimed as "The Bower." Ruth read it aloud, standing still in her place of observation.

"Who is Lady Cunliffe, mother? I never heard the name, have you?"

"Never, dear; but that does not matter

—every person and thing is changed—some new-comer, probably, who wishes to make your acquaintance.”

“And yours also, I hope, mother?”

“Never mind me, Ruth. I have no wish to make acquaintances here or elsewhere. I came solely on your urgent request to be with *you*, as your guest, as long as it may suit in various ways. Now, my dear, pray go down, and do not keep that lady any longer waiting.”

“But, mother, won’t you come with me?”

Ruth was beginning, but a hasty gesture from Mrs. Maxwell stopped her speech midway, and rather reluctantly she withdrew to meet her newly-arrived guest, who was already established in the drawing-room.

Ruth came in with a little murmured speech of “I hope I have not kept you waiting?” when she stopped suddenly, rather amazed,

and somewhat amused, at the appearance and bearing of her visitor. She saw, in the first place, a little woman as regarded height, but of considerable circumference, dressed in the brightest of green satin, with a shawl of Indian splendour, surmounted by a little lace bonnet, in which lilac flowers, feathers, and ribbons strove for the pre-eminence. The next thing which struck her was the beaming countenance with which the lady was advancing to meet her, every line of the round smiling face displaying an interest of no common ordinary acquaintance, and seeming to claim some sort of recognition of the same. The first words addressed by this strange little lady were as startling to Ruth as her general aspect.

“My dear child, I am so glad to see you at last! But, of course, you do not know me—and how should you?—for I never heard

of your existence till a year ago ; but now we have met, I hope we shall be very good friends for the rest of our lives."

"You are very kind," stammered Miss Maxwell, as she gave both her hands to meet the two outstretched ones of her friendly visitor, whilst her perplexity was plainly visible.

"Not kind at all, my dear, only I hope I shall be when we know each other better ; and, to begin with, you must let me kiss your pretty face. I am glad you *are* so pretty, for I am your aunt, my dear."

"There must be some mistake," replied Ruth, colouring at the admiration expressed, and also with the surprise of such an unexpected announcement. Her speech was interrupted by the lady's exclaiming—

"No mistake at all, my dear. Are not you Dr. Maxwell's own daughter?"

"Yes : my father was a medical man, but he was not called doctor, except by his poor patients, and had no claim to the title, and he had only one sister, my aunt Penrose, and she had no children."

"Exactly—all right," returned Lady Cunliffe, triumphantly. "You are my niece, and my own niece, for it is through Mr. John Penrose alone that I became aware of our relationship."

"Oh ! but he knows very little about me, really," said Ruth hastily, with a little feeling of resentment against her guardian's meddlesome interference in every concern and relation of her life, and continuing : "I know he has a great deal to do with my affairs, and the money Aunt Penrose kindly left me, but I never saw him, except as a child almost ten years ago, till just now."

"But, for all that, he may surely know something more about your people than about yourself?" asked the lady, with a smile beaming on her round face, that was not all mirth.

"Oh! yes, he was far more intimate with Mr. and Mrs. Penrose than I was, though she was my aunt, and the only aunt I ever heard of," replied Ruth, with a shade of gentle obstinacy.

"Tut! tut! my dear, no one disputes Mrs. Penrose's auntship, or desires to add to the number of your father's sisters."

"He *had* only one," persisted Ruth, *sotto voce*.

"But surely, my dear, you will allow your *mother* to have had such encumbrances?"

"My mother!" repeated Ruth, in bewilderment, the only mother she had ever

known rising up to the exclusion of all other—"my mother never speaks of any of her relations—I do not think she has any."

The last part of the sentence was spoken meditatively, as if trying to recall anything that Mrs. Maxwell might have said, but failing in the endeavour.

Then Lady Cunliffe broke in rather abruptly with the question—

"But had you no mother of your *own*, Ruth Maxwell?—or do you discard the idea altogether, with all it may entail?"

Then, as a new light broke in upon Ruth's mind, the ready colour again rushed to her brow, as she said,

"I beg your pardon, Lady Cunliffe, I see now what you mean; but I have never known any mother but my father's second wife, who has, in truth, been everything to



me; nor did I know I had a relation in the world except my aunt Penrose, who is dead. Are you indeed a sister of my own mamma's?"

Ruth here substituted the word *mamma* for *mother*. She had always given the latter name to her step-mother, and would not have been disloyal to her even in that small particular. So, after that admission on Ruth's part, that an aunt might not be an impossibility, the explanation followed easily; and when Lady Cunliffe took her departure, nearly an hour afterwards, it was in the settled and relative position of aunt and niece. The parting words of the former were—

"Now mind, my dear Ruth, mind you say all and everything that is nice and kind for me to Mrs. Maxwell. I am sure she must be a dear woman, for you to love her

as you do ; and tell her we must be good friends. Poor soul ! it must be hard for her coming back into this neighbourhood !”

Then Ruth answered—

“ Oh ! but I don’t think she minds it now. She says every thing and person that ever she knew is entirely changed, so I hope in a little time she will feel quite settled, and—as happy as I can make her.”

Lady Cunliffe glanced quickly up into her newly-discovered niece’s face, and saw she knew as little of her step-mother’s family antecedents as she did of her own. And then came the thought—

“ It is not for *me* to tell her about the Beaumonts, when it is evident she knows nothing. Well, it will all come round in time, I daresay ; and I shall do no good trying to push things and people into their proper places before that time comes ; but

there is no harm in watching how it will all happen."

Then, rousing herself from her short reverie, she again kissed her "charming new niece," as she called her, and, entering her comfortable carriage, drove away, with a thousand new and pleasant thoughts and anticipations coursing each other through her busy brain.

Ruth Maxwell's thoughts were perhaps hardly less active, as she saw her aunt drive away, and slowly ascended the stairs to her mother's morning room, there to relate the startling events of the last hour. And yet Ruth felt almost reluctant to reveal the fact that her step-mother's prognostication was come true, and that a relative, and a very near one, was already come to claim a share in that love and affection which had been as yet so exclusively her own. Was it that Ruth feared her

mother might feel jealous of the new-comer, or that she hesitated to speak of the long dead mother, who had been so persistently ignored hitherto in the family circle? She could hardly analyze her own feelings on the occasion, but was sensible of a certain amount both of embarrassment and reluctance in volunteering the news she had to impart.

She was, however, much relieved by Mrs. Maxwell's ready acceptance of the state of the case, and understanding with quick perception how it had all come to pass. She exclaimed, ere Ruth's hesitating tale was told,

"I see and understand it all, my dearest. You have really got a relation, a *bona fide* aunt, in this Lady Cunliffe, and, from what you say, she seems a good, worthy sort of woman. Not one of the sort of relations I

foretold," she added, with a half-smile, "of the needy sort, that the rumour of your riches might have conjured up from some unheard-of locality, to claim your interest and help. No; this Lady Cunliffe is no doubt your own poor mother's eldest sister, and is both a pleasant and creditable connection to have discovered. I congratulate you, my dear, with all my heart."

Then all was right, and there was no jealousy or uncomfortable feeling on the part of Mrs. Maxwell. No, her thoughts were otherwise engaged; she was daily and hourly becoming more absorbed in her own individual interests. She was thinking so much of her *own* children, and what might befall her through them, that the announcement of her step-daughter's having found a real living relation of her own seemed of very secondary consideration, and, as it were,

to authorize her in seeking those who should  
in their turn be all exclusively her own.  
And yet she loved Ruth none the less.

## CHAPTER XII.

FOR some time after that new acquaintance and acquisition of a relation to Ruth, the time went on quietly and pleasantly enough. It did not make much difference in Ruth's manner of life or train of ideas. She was satisfied to admit her new aunt's claims on her time and attention to a certain extent; and it may be said, on Lady Cunliffe's part, that she was by no means an exacting person. Ruth was no longer quite a girl, and she had led hitherto a somewhat hard, practical life, and though her heart was very tenacious of long-existing claims and affections, it was not liable to

any sudden access of new and tender emotion. So she took the opening of this new phase in her existence with characteristic equanimity. In fact, the idea of the young mother, who had died at the time of her birth, was but an indistinct vision, having never been cherished by those around her, whilst all the deep love of which her nature was capable had been drawn out by and bestowed upon her step-mother.

Mrs. Maxwell came in for a considerable share of Lady Cunliffe's kindly feelings. There was no resisting the good-natured, friendly importunity with which the Judge's widow urged her claims to be admitted to the lonely woman's acquaintance and occasional companionship. Lady Cunliffe so frankly admitted the prior claims Mrs. Maxwell had on her new niece's time and attention, that she could not but reciprocate in



some degree the friendly feeling. Besides, there was a tone of genuine feeling about Lady Cunliffe that, in spite of all Mrs. Maxwell's depression, went straight to her heart. She had, in truth, a very tender one, and a few words of real sympathy and kindness would tend to comfort and raise her spirits for the day; whilst any manifestation of a hostile nature, even from a careless child, would make her uneasy and unhappy in the same proportion.

Alas! for those (of whom Amelia Maxwell was one) whose sensitive nature renders them so dependent on the good or evil words and actions of others! For unless they may happen to be placed in an exceptionally fortunate social position in life, and so exempt from exposure to the many "stings and arrows" which assail the less successful, there is little or no enjoyment

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for them. One is almost tempted to say in regard to this life, "It had been good for them if they had never been born."

Mrs. Maxwell was at last persuaded to return one of Lady Cunliffe's many visits, and present herself one day with her step-daughter at The Bower. It was pain and grief to her all the time. She was nervously fearful of meeting any of the neighbourhood there, and came away determined not to go again. Lady Cunliffe was too well satisfied with that concession (being the first visit Mrs. Maxwell had paid since her husband's death) to urge her guest to repeat her visit, or even remain longer than she was inclined to do. It was a new interest in the prosperous woman's life, which had hitherto been passed much more in men's society than in women's, to meet with one so gentle and refined, and yet so free from

all other social claims, as this Mrs. Maxwell. At the same time, there was so much delicate reserve about her new acquaintance that Lady Cunliffe, with all her frank *laissez-aller* of speech and manner, never ventured to allude to her domestic history, and the miserable estrangement which she saw existed between the mother and the children living in her immediate neighbourhood. It was, however, an excitement to Lady Cunliffe, in the absence of all other. She found herself constantly thinking of the Beaumonts and their mother, and speculating on the chances that might arise to re-unite them. She was sensible, also, of a lively curiosity to ascertain exactly the state of existing circumstances—how much the children knew of their mother's vicinity, and how the latter (who, of course, was aware of all) felt disposed towards

those who had so long ignored her claims to their consideration and affection. But it was impossible to gain anything from Mrs. Maxwell herself. She shrank with the acutest pain from the slightest approach to anything like a confidence on this most delicate and tender point, avoiding with evident alarm any mention even of the place where her children lived, and seeming almost unconscious of their existence there.

Thus Lady Cunliffe felt nearly sure that with all minor details of the family at Harewood Park Mrs. Maxwell was at that time unacquainted. The gulf that lay between her and her children had never been spanned in the remotest degree. It was a casual mention of Miss Powys's name, made in Mrs. Maxwell's hearing, that induced that belief on Lady Cunliffe's part. The air of unruffled composure with which Mrs.

Maxwell heard the name told its own tale.

As regarded Ruth, her aunt was not long in discovering that her state of mind in regard to these family troubles was that of sheer simple ignorance and innocence. She knew nothing either of the Beaumonts, or her step-mother's connexion with them. It seemed to the Judge's widow a strange state of things; but there was no doubt that so it was. How long could it last?—and what would be the result of the discovery? This question Lady Cunliffe not only debated frequently in her own mind, but was apt to discuss it also both with her usually silent companion, Miss Wheeler, and her favourite visitor, Mr. Penrose; and she mooted it the more persistently, no doubt, because she could never get any satisfactory solution of the enigma from either of the persons so interrogated.

That Sophy Wheeler treated the whole question with that *insouciance* which was a part apparently of her nature, was by no means surprising to her patroness, who, for the last ten years, had sought in vain for any signs of sympathy, or marks of interest for others, in Sophy's faded face; yet, in some respects, they got on well, for Lady Cunliffe was easily satisfied, and Miss Wheeler supplied the place of a listener though saying little herself, but otherwise discoursing most eloquent music, in which the good lady's soul delighted.

It might have been supposed that Sophy must have felt some alarm in the prospect of seeing herself superseded in her patroness's regard and need of a companion, in seeing this new and near relation so unexpectedly spring to light. If Miss Wheeler ever did experience any misgivings on the

subject at the commencement of the acquaintance, no sign thereof appeared in her unmoved demeanour either towards Lady Cunliffe or the new claimant on her interest and affection. And it was plainly evident, ere half a dozen visits had passed, that Ruth had neither the remotest idea of superseding Sophy in her post of companion to the Lady of the Bower, nor any inclination to do so.

Mr. Penrose, on his part, professed, as he actually felt to be the case, perfect ignorance as to the state of feeling in all concerned in the family history then under observation. It was a subject too which, from some cause or other, he always seemed unwilling to discuss. No doubt Mr. Penrose was intimate with the family at Harewood Park, to a certain extent; but it appeared it was an intimacy which had been the result of peculiar outward circumstances, which had at

various times thrown him into their society abroad, without the restraints which might have arisen had the acquaintance been purely English and home-made. Such as it was, however, Lady Cunliffe gathered from the young man's disclaimer that the intimacy had never penetrated into the inner circle of unreserved or confidential communication between himself and Mr. Beaumont.

"Depend upon it, Sophy," said Lady Cunliffe, one afternoon, after the departure of their visitor, Mr. Penrose—"he knows no more than we do what are the feelings of Mr. Beaumont and his sister towards their mother. I don't even believe he would venture to name her to either of them."

"I should be surprised if he did," replied Miss Wheeler, curtly, but decidedly, not even looking up from the delicate lace-work



over which she seemed to be bent on ruining her eyes.

"Well, my dear," said her patroness, smiling, "I don't see how you can come to the conclusion so readily, seeing how little you can really know of the degree of intimacy between John Penrose and Louis Beaumont."

Lady Cunliffe had a great trick of calling all the men of her acquaintance by their Christian and surnames, without any prefix of customary respect. It was an old habit of hers, but one she took some pains, when she thought of it, to lay aside.

Miss Wheeler did not answer for a minute or two. She seemed to be quite engrossed by the mysteries of the delicate stitch she was then making, and almost started when Lady Cunliffe, after a short time of patient,

or rather impatient waiting, said, somewhat sharply,

“Eh, Sophy? I say how is it possible for you to be surprised, or not surprised, at anything that passes, or does not pass, between those two young men?”

“What young men?” asked Sophy absently, as if she had lost the thread of the elder lady’s argument. Then continuing, “Oh, I see you are still thinking about those people at the Park, and our neighbour living in the country town, Mr. Penrose. Well, one has impressions sometimes on various subjects, though it may be hard to name the exact cause from whence they arise. But if you ask for my opinion on this matter, I should say that Mr. Beaumont (I know nothing of his sister) likes Mr. Penrose very well out hunting or shooting, or participating in any of the

general amusements about here ; yes, and finds him entertaining enough at dinner, or in general society ; but for all that, I do not think Mr. Beaumont ever forgets he is the master of Harewood Park—and his forefathers have been so for centuries past—and that Mr. Penrose is the Brewer of Castleford, and so have been his ancestors for generations past.”

Then Miss Wheeler laid down her work, and leant back in her chair, as if exhausted with such an unwonted outlay of speech and opinion. Lady Cunliffe not only smiled her usual token of approval, but almost chuckled at her companion's remark, saying,

“That speech is not the fruit of observation, Sophy, but of imagination ; and though you cannot possibly tell that it is as you say on Mr. Beaumont's part, I have no doubt if you were in his place, that would

be your mode of thinking and acting."

"Possibly," replied the companion languidly. "We are very apt to judge by analogy."

"But there is no analogy in this case, Sophy! you have never been placed in a similar position to Louis Beaumont."

"To Mr. Beaumont or his sister—No!" with a little laugh, half scornful and half bitter, "No—but the other side of the question suits me best. The inferior position of Mr. Penrose amongst his grand friends."

"You know I never thought of *that* in regard to you, Sophy Wheeler?" said her patroness, with an air of simple concern.

"No, you have not, I know, but others have, you may be sure. Do you not suppose that everyone who comes here, and in every house where we go, thinks of me as

‘Lady Cunliffe’s companion?’ and though they admit me as an acquaintance, and, on account of a certain talent for music I possess, often welcome me cordially, yet there is no real intimacy between me and any of them.”

“Then it’s your own fault, Sophy Wheeler,” replied her friend stoutly. “It is you who will never come forward and make friends, and yet expect others to take all the trouble; and if they don’t, then throw the blame on them. Are not you my friend? and fit to be anybody’s friend, if you chose it? You think all those stupid things yourself, and then fancy it is the people who think them. Now, my dear, do let me beg you, as a favour to myself, to dismiss all such unpleasant misgivings.”

“It is my misfortune to entertain them, not my fault, dear Lady Cunliffe; but I will

say no more about them at present ; and now I will speak to you only in the tones you love best."

And then Miss Wheeler rose, went to the piano, and played and sang her patroness to sleep.

Meanwhile, the gentleman who had been so freely discussed, as to his social position, appeared at last to be making his way to some degree of intimacy with Ruth Maxwell and her step-mother.

At first he was very chary of his visits, they were few and far between. Then, as time went on, Ruth began to feel she had no reason to dread any interference on his part, or even to expect such a degree of interest in herself and her affairs as would lead him to desire a constant supervision of either.

The two women were very much alone

—they had but few visitors, and as Mrs. Maxwell, as a rule, never appeared to any, the very fact of her existence was barely recognised, and no one knew or thought of her as the former Mrs. Beaumont. That Miss Maxwell had neither part nor lot with that grand county family was patent to all the inhabitants of Castleford, as well as to those living in its immediate neighbourhood. It became known that she was the niece of the rich Indian widow, Lady Cunliffe, and that she was a connexion of Mr. Penrose, the banker and brewer of Castleford, and had inherited property from the family.

Ruth's father had been but little known during the short time he lived in that town, and those who had heard of his first marriage remembered it no more. As Lady Cunliffe was the only person who knew Mrs. Maxwell, it was often supposed that

she was the sister of that lady, and real mother of the girl who always spoke of her as such. Thus, to those who remembered there was such a person as Mrs. Maxwell, and to those whose memories were refreshed by seeing a veiled lady driving out with Miss Maxwell, she was set down as a confirmed invalid, and decided recluse.

The clergyman at whose church Ruth had secured seats for herself and mother, called with his wife and family, and with them Mrs. Maxwell made a slight acquaintance; for they were total strangers to that part of the country, and had been but a year or two at Castleford, and in time Ruth was persuaded occasionally to visit the Rectory.

She had laid it down to herself, as a rule not to be departed from, that she would not leave her step-mother alone for purposes of gaiety or amusement, and it was very rarely



that the joint persuasions of Lady Cunliffe and Mrs. Maxwell were powerful enough to overcome that resolution. By degrees, however, Ruth found that Mr. Penrose's visits were a pleasant variety in the monotony of their daily lives; and it came to pass that, as the young man intuitively perceived he was less unwelcome, the kindness which lay hidden in his heart began to assert itself in increased attention to Mrs. Maxwell and her step-daughter. They were both rewarded for the concession made to something of an unspoken prejudice against John Penrose, by the discovery of much that was pleasant and interesting in his society. And, on his part, he found a friend (as he believed)—just such a one as he had dreamt of, but never found—in Ruth Maxwell. She soon came to take an interest in his affairs, her own being, in some

sort, wrapped up in them ; and he found a most intelligent listener when he spoke to her of the men and their families who were employed in his extensive brewery works. Ruth, with her step-mother, at his request, visited those families. It was just what he had so long wanted—some kind-hearted, clear-headed womanly superintendence of their concerns. Every day the attraction grew stronger that led him to that old-fashioned house in Castleford, and full of growing interest were the subjects there discussed.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“**Y**OU are late, Mr. Penrose.”

This was from Maude Beaumont, who, somewhat flushed, but looking beautiful, stood presiding over one of the many gaily-decorated stalls of the Fancy Fair held in the conservatories at the Abbey, Sir Digby Ferrers's fine old ancestral place.

Sir Digby was one of the county members, and, therefore, sacrificed himself in this way to its interests, when it was deemed advisable by certain fashionable ladies that a bazaar should be got up for the benefit of the hospital at Castleford. It was the middle of October when this Fancy Fair

took place, therefore that it should be held in the open air was a manifest impossibility ; and thence it came to pass that Sir Digby Ferrers was persuaded to open his magnificent conservatories and grounds for the use of the public that day.

Side by side stood the two acknowledged beauties of the day—Miss Beaumont, dark, sparkling, and lovely ; and Miss Powys, not less so, in her more *mignon* but exquisitely fair, fairy-like beauty. They had done their part towards the success of the day nobly, as was testified by the almost empty state of their counter, on which hardly a thing of even trifling value remained ; and they were meditating a speedy retreat from their wearisome position, when the appearance of Mr. Penrose in front of their stall drew from Maude the observation just recorded.

"You are late, Mr. Penrose."

"So it seems, judging from the empty look of your emporium," replied the gentleman, smiling. "And I wish you joy of your success."

"That is very generous of you," observed Gwendoline Powys, "seeing you have not deigned to contribute to it in any way—it is really very shabby of you, Mr. Penrose, for we fully thought you meant to patronise us, and now you are too late."

"Too late!" repeated John Penrose. "What a melancholy cadence rings in these two little words! But I cannot allow that, whilst anything remains to be had. What will you let me have, Miss Powys?"

This was said to Gwen, but the look was directed to Maude.

"What made you so late, Mr. Penrose?" asked Maude, evading the look and busying

herself with some trifles that were stowed away in a box near her.

"I can answer that query very easily. I was preparing to come two hours ago, when I had a message from Lady Cunliffe asking me to go and escort her and a lady who is with her: and I was kept such an immense time in waiting at The Bower."

"Oh, I see!—you have brought the Begum and her companion with you. Well, at all events, that was kind," said Maude Beaumont, with the least approach to a sneer.

Mr. Penrose's good-looking face flushed for a moment painfully; then he asked,

"What could I do? I had no idea she would be so awfully dilatory in her movements. But I hope I am not too late for—for—my—slippers."

"*Yours*, Mr. Penrose! I never considered them yours."

"I said I would buy them at any price," answered the gentleman, "and I am ready to redeem my word."

"I am sorry for the sake of the hospital that you cannot have an oppprtunity of doing so, Mr. Penrose, as they have been sold long, long ago."

"I am unlucky, then," said John Penrose; adding, in a low voice, "May I ask who the fortunate purchaser is?"

"Oh, yes, we are perfectly open in all our proceedings here. They were sold to the first bidder. Sir Digby Ferrers gave me ten pounds for them. Too good an offer to refuse, was it not?" asked Maude, rather triumphantly.

"Yes, far too good an offer to refuse," answered Mr. Penrose, with a lowering look and emphatic tone.

Maude Beaumont blushed deeply, looked

very angry for a minute ; then, as no one spoke, and Gwen had vanished with some young lady friends who stood near, she recovered her usual cool self-possession, and asked, in mocking tones,

“But is there nothing I can have the pleasure of showing you to-day? I am sorry I have not got the article you have set your heart on ; but if slippers are your urgent want, I have still a pair left, which I shall be happy to sell you.”

As Maude spoke, she wickedly produced a pair, the work of Mrs. Nelson, which were hideous to look at, and horrible in imagination to wear. No wonder they had been left on Maude's fair hands.

“Oh, those ! Thank you, no, I don't exactly think they would suit me. What a size, too!—they are twice the size of mine.”



"Of *yours*, Mr. Penrose," exclaimed Maude, again flushing warmly. "Whoever gave them to you?"

"No one *gave* them, but I was told I might buy; so I did look upon them as my own."

"They might have been yours if you had come in time; but as you did not think them worth coming for, I could not refuse them to others who did."

"But, Miss Beaumont, surely if Sir Digby did want a pair of slippers, he might have taken these; they are much more likely to be useful to him than to me."

Maude looked up very indignantly at the young man, who confronted her with eyes as steadfast as her own as she said—glancing towards the magnificent pile of building seen through the conservatory windows, with all the splendour of the grounds around—

"I cannot see the force of your argument, Mr. Penrose; or why, because you think a thing too bad for your own use, they are more suitable to—to——"

"Sir Digby," she was about to say, when Mr. Penrose cut her speech short with,

"To the owner of this fine place. Well, perhaps it *is* presumption in me to venture to say that a man with gouty feet may require large slippers, though he is the owner of all this magnificence."

Miss Beaumont drew herself up very haughtily as she replied with perfect coolness,

"We are wandering from our subject, Mr. Penrose. I fancied you came to my stall to buy something, but as it seems I am mistaken, I will wish you good morning, for I think the selling business of the day is over."

And then Maude looked for her hat, and began her little preparations for going away. John Penrose stood watching her, half in anger, quite in annoyance, till he caught a relenting glance in a hasty look she cast in his direction ; and then he, unable to withstand it, said,

“I will buy your refuse slippers, Miss Beaumont, if you wish it.”

Maude's whole face lighted up with conscious triumph as she said, with an affectation of carelessness,

“You can have them, Mr. Penrose ; and I daresay they will look better when they are made up, and can be cut to any size you like. I will let you have them cheap.”

“Thank you, Miss Beaumont, we have to consider the interests of the hospital, if our own tastes are not exactly suited. I do not

wish to give less for them than for—mine.”

And then Mr. Penrose laid down his £10 note, which Miss Beaumont received with satisfaction, in the comfortable assurance that she had done her duty at her stall that day, and contributed largely, by the force of her own attractive presence, to the benefit of the charity so aided.

Maude walked slowly away, for during the last few minutes, in which she had been talking to Mr. Penrose, the building in which the stalls were erected had become gradually deserted; and as they turned to leave it, they found themselves alone.

“Ah,” said Maude, looking round and laughing, “I see I am the last rose of Summer! all my lovely companions are gone—faded out of sight! Well, I have done my duty well to the very last, I hope;

and so have you, Mr. Penrose—though you did come so late, you have done all that could have been expected of you, had you arrived at an earlier hour.”

“ I am glad you are satisfied with me in any way,” replied the young man rather stiffly ; then after they had walked a few steps in silence, which Maude did not seem inclined to break, he asked, “ When you wished me good morning just now, Miss Beaumont, was it a dismissal from your presence for the rest of the day ? for if it was, I fear you will be displeased at my following in the same path at this time.”

“ Why should you not walk in the same path if it pleases you, Mr. Penrose ? And I don’t see well how you can select any other just now, without trampling on the flowers, which to my mind would still be more objectionable.”

FROM LONDON

John Penrose entered in entered some  
long little speech in reply to the words  
"but" and "but": the words "displeased"  
and "annoyance" being alone uttered by the  
body to whom it was addressed and who  
answered with something of a pouting or  
impatient look and manner:

"I really don't know what you are com-  
plaining about so dolefully. Mr. Penrose:  
and to set your mind entirely at ease if  
possible. I will first assure you that I am  
never displeased or angry, or annoyed, or  
anything else you may consider objectionable  
at anything done or said, or left undone or  
unsaid, by every-day acquaintances; if they  
are rude, or disagreeable, or commit them-  
selves in any way, it is their fault, not mine.  
Why should I distress myself about it? I  
as regards my *friends*. I dare-  
cross enough with *them* some-

As Mr. Penrose pondered over this ambiguous speech, longing, yet not daring, to ask in which light Miss Beaumont considered him, a sudden turn in the walk brought them in full view of a group of people at a little distance. Gwendoline Powys was one of them, leaning on her guardian's arm, with a peculiarly happy look, as she glanced up from time to time in his face, whilst he was talking earnestly to a tall beautiful girl, or rather woman, on whose arm the rotund person of the gaily-attired Indian widow, appeared to hang rather heavily. There were some other well-known figures in the group, but those just named attracted Miss Beaumont's attention at first.

"There is the little Begum, I declare—always smiling and happy, I suppose, by the way. I see the crowd is dispersing fast—that is, the public in general—they are expected to depart at five; but I suppose you

are amongst the *élite*, Mr. Penrose—I mean the invited guests?”

“Yes. Sir Digby—or rather Lady Elizabeth—sent me a card for the concert which is to follow the luncheon, at half-past five.”

“I think it will be pleasant when the crowd disperses,” said Maude benignly. “Not but that we shall have a considerable crush still; but the rooms at the Abbey are so spacious, and Lady Elizabeth arranges everything so well, that I daresay we shall be well satisfied. Do tell me now, Mr. Penrose, as you came with them, is the tall lady I see in sweeping grey silk and lovely little pink bonnet (so few people look well in pink), that stony companion of our friend at The Bower?”

“What, Miss Wheeler! You must see it cannot be her!”



"I cannot see very distinctly at this distance, and in this failing light. Miss Wheeler is really not ill-looking, and well-dressed and animated, she *might* be pretty!"

"She *might be!* as you say; but never for a moment like the lady you see there. That is Miss Maxwell—Lady Cunliffe's niece."

"I have never seen her before," began Maude; but ere the words had well passed her lips, Gwendoline was at her side, exclaiming,

"Yes, you have; and so have I, and all of us!"

"What do you mean, Gwen? You know I hate mystifications. Tell me who *l'amie inconnue* professes to be?"

"She is the girl that jumped down and picked me up when I fell on the railway," replied Miss Powys, eagerly. "I should not have known her myself, but your brother

did. It was Louis who remembered her, the instant he set his eyes upon her. Was it not strange? And yet he had only seen her by lamplight, that night in the railway-carriage; but then he is so quick, and observes people and things more than anyone I ever knew," added Gwendoline, in a half-whisper; to which Maude made answer, in the same tone of voice,

"It was half instinct, no doubt, in this case, Gwen; he *felt* she was the person who had saved you. Well, I shall like also to know her on that account. But, meanwhile, cannot you tell us something about her, Mr. Penrose?—who and what she is, and whence she comes, and whether she is as nice as she looks?"

Never had John Penrose felt it more difficult to answer Maude Beaumont than at that supreme moment; for, though actually

no relation, or even connection of her own, was not Ruth Maxwell the step-daughter of Maude Beaumont's own mother? And yet he dared not proclaim the fact. He could not take upon himself to lift the veil that separated the two so closely united. He therefore contented himself with saying,

"Miss Maxwell is Lady Cunliffe's niece—her sister's daughter, she says."

"Why have we never seen her anywhere before, then?" asked Maude.

"Because she never goes into society. Her—mother is an invalid, and she only came to-day because Miss Wheeler was taken suddenly ill, and Lady Cunliffe declared she must give up coming here herself, unless her niece would take Miss Wheeler's place; and so the two ladies persuaded her, and she came."

"Not such a very great concession, I

should think, for a girl like Miss Maxwell. She *ought* to go out and see and be seen. Now please come and introduce me to our heroine!"

As the ceremony was being duly performed, Sir Digby Ferrers came up, with a look of relief and satisfaction.

"Now, Miss Beaumont, I have been on duty all this afternoon, so I am come for my reward. Let me take you to have some dinner. I am sure you must want some, after all your exertions; but I know I shall have the satisfaction of hearing that you and Miss Powys have taken twice as much at your stall as any other lady here."

"I daresay, Sir Digby, Lady Elizabeth and her nieces have done wonders, as well as Gwendoline and I."

"Oh! my mother has had a very fair share of custom, I daresay, but we all know

where the greatest crowd congregated to-day. Will you come now?"

But Maude had shrunk back from the proffered arm of the master of the Abbey. It was a conspicuous place, she thought, and there were others present with a better right to fill it than herself. So she stood still, saying,

"I think Lady Damer will eat no dinner if she does not get her proper place to eat it in; and I see she is looking out for you, Sir Digby."

The worthy man's countenance fell as he replied,

"I thought, at a thing of this kind, we were to be allowed to please ourselves, after the duty of the day was over."

"I am afraid," replied Maude, laughing, "that yours as host can only end with the day. So"—seeing Mr. Penrose near, she

said, hastily—"I shall go in with Louis and Gwen."

But as she turned to take her brother's arm, she saw him, with amiable *empressement*, dividing Lady Cunliffe and her niece.

## CHAPTER XIV.

AND so it chanced that the two beauties, and most admired of all the girls present, were left to take each other into the large hall laid for the collation.

Maude and Gwendoline both laughed at this strange position of affairs; whilst Mr. Penrose held back moodily, having noticed Miss Beaumont's avoidance. The only comfort was, had she not also avoided or declined the proffered arm of the master of the feast? So he kept somewhat sulkily in the rear, whilst the young ladies walked on together, but had not proceeded many

steps before they were eagerly appropriated by two out of the many young men present, who had previously held back, believing that they had each their appointed escort on the occasion ; whether to the satisfaction of the two girls themselves, might be doubtful. But it happened that, in Maude's case, a place had been reserved, into which Sir Digby, having settled Lady Damer in her proper place of honour on the one side of his own chair, proceeded to install Miss Beaumont, with due regard to her companion, on the other.

The banquet, like all other good things, came to an end at last ; and then the lady-guests dispersed themselves about the suites of rooms and corridors, which, with their wealth of old pictures, were opened for their amusement that evening ; and in a short time they were joined by the gentle-



men, and soon after that the concert began. A little vocal, and a great deal of instrumental music, constituted the performance, and between the pauses the guests conversed and wandered about, far and near, as their various tastes might lead.

Amongst the fixtures to one favoured spot was Lady Cunliffe, anxious not to lose a note of the sweet sounds she so dearly loved. She was very happy that day, and yet there was a sort of restlessness strangely mixed up with it all. Mr. Beaumont had attached himself with a curious pertinacity to her party—that was, to herself and niece. He had recognised the latter as the brave girl who had, with unselfish generosity, thrown herself between death and his all but betrothed cousin. Even in the short lamplight interview, and in the agitation of the moment, Louis Beaumont had been

greatly struck with Ruth's appearance. It was not so much the beauty of her features, perfect as they were, that attracted him, as the calm, intellectual expression of her countenance. In spite of all the difference of outward surroundings, and the brief space in which he had seen her at the station, he remembered her the instant she appeared with Lady Cunliffe in the grounds that day.

Mr. Beaumont was a man accustomed to take his own way, either at home or in society, and it was generally a perfectly gentlemanly and pleasant way; only he cared less than most people of his position for conventionalities. He was quite sure never to outrage the feelings or peculiarities of others in anything he said or did. Still there was a simple straightforwardness about him which often stepped over a boundary,

whilst others would have gone miles round, and arrived at the same spot at last.

Thus, secure in his own recollections, the instant he saw Ruth, after a moment's hasty survey, he came up to her, and holding out his hand, claimed her acquaintance. Ruth was for a moment startled, but, like himself, she was a very simple and practical person, besides being extremely unversed in the intricacies of society; so she speedily brought her memory back to the time her new acquaintance referred to, and then quickly remembered the countenance of the person who thus addressed her, and believed it was the same Mr. Powys whose cousin she understood she had rescued.

This mistake was soon set to rights, and the acquaintance progressed merrily. Ruth spoke of coming with her aunt, so Louis Beaumont, in his own mind, set her down

as a Miss Cunliffe. Then, in a short time, a further explanation ensued. Lady Cunliffe's attention had been for the time engrossed with some acquaintances on the other side, and as one of them was an officer whom she had known in India, there was so much to be said that she had no ears nor eyes for anything that might be going on on the side where Ruth stood by her.

At last Lady Cunliffe's old friend moved on, and then she turned to talk to Mr. Beaumont, who, to her surprise, she found was already on the best terms with her niece. The cause was soon explained, and then she understood that till that time they had been strangers.

"I think," said Mr. Beaumont, after a pause, "that I ought to ask for a formal introduction to your niece, Lady Cunliffe; for although I have taken the liberty of

introducing myself, I have not the pleasure of actually knowing her name, unless it is the same as yours."

"Oh! not at all," returned the lady, in much perplexity, dreading to utter the name he must remember as that of his mother; and she believed it to be held in abhorrence on that account; and yet hoping, from its being so common a one, that it might pass without much notice at the time. She therefore continued, to divert any suspicion that might arise in his mind as to Ruth's relationship, "My niece is the daughter of my youngest sister—her name is Ruth Maxwell. Miss Maxwell—Mr. Beaumont: Now I have introduced you properly, though it seems rather like reading a preface at the end of a book, which I generally do if I read it at all, for I can understand both it and the book best then."

Thus the good lady rambled on, to divert Mr. Beaumont's attention from the unpleasant name, which, from his start and contracted brow, it was evident he immediately recognised. But it was, as Lady Cunliffe also thought, a very common name—there were Maxwells in every part of the world ; and it seemed the Indian widow's sister had married one, no doubt, in India also ; whilst another of the name had become so hateful to his imagination in having deprived him of his mother, besides being hateful to his recollection in other ways. Lady Cunliffe on her part thought, " I am glad I never told her—as she knew nothing, she could never have looked so pretty and so calm and innocent on meeting him ; not that she has anything to reproach herself with, poor dear ! "

Ruth's unconcern in hearing the name of her new acquaintance went far to restore

Louis' equanimity ; for he had never heard of " the doctor " being a widower when he married Mrs. Beaumont ; nor had he the least suspicion of the existence of a daughter by a first marriage. So Ruth appeared to him simply as a most charming girl, with a very objectionable name.

There was no dancing that evening—there never was at the Abbey. Very many were the pleasant parties given there, but no balls. It was not that Sir Digby disliked dancing for others, or had entirely given it up on his own account elsewhere ; but his mother, Lady Elizabeth Ferrers, had lost her only daughter soon after she came out, being only eighteen ; and from that time her mother never entered a ball-room. But twenty years had passed away since poor Mabel Ferrers's death, and her mother had by degrees emerged from her seclusion, and

presided over her son's bachelor household, and was likely to be mistress there till he married.

That Sir Digby should do so, was the one great desire of his mother's heart. She was a very charming old lady, and quite ready to resign her place at the Abbey in favour of her son's wife, whenever it should please him to choose one.

She had her own dower-house to retire to—and not very distant from the place she had lived in and loved, and where she was so truly beloved ever since she had come there, a young bride, many, many years ago. But time was passing, and her son was no longer young—almost more than middle-aged, and yet there seemed no prospect of his bringing another daughter home for her to love, in the place of the one she had lost; and, as years went on and Sir Digby remained



single, he began to be considered, at last, in his own neighbourhood, as a confirmed old bachelor. It was, therefore, with no small satisfaction that Lady Elizabeth Ferrers noticed her son's devotion to Miss Beaumont, which dated from the time the Beaumonts returned to live at Harewood Park—or rather when Maude and her cousin joined her brother there. There was, no doubt, considerable disparity of age—five-and-twenty years, at the least!—but that to Lady Elizabeth seemed nothing, when it concerned a wife for her son; besides, in a mother's eyes, her children are always, in some degree, youthful, and it is very certain that Lady Elizabeth accredited her son with that, as well as every other earthly perfection.

Miss Beaumont was, therefore, made much of that day by the mother as well as

the son, and most of the friends and relations then staying at the Abbey were quite ready to follow the lead of their pleasant host and hostess. Mande enjoyed her position. Not that she wished to compromise herself as yet in any way ; she prized her liberty, and with her youth and beauty and many advantages, was inclined to enjoy it a little longer ; besides, she had by no means made up her mind to accept Sir Digby Ferrers, for she felt they belonged to different generations ! Still it was very satisfactory to be so courted and deferred to when at that charming old place, where everything spoke of centuries of long possession by its wealthy owners. She was quite inclined to love the dignified and refined old lady who presided there so charmingly, with her still delicately-fair, aristocratic features, and in every look and movement

testifying to the pure, gentle blood which flowed in her veins and in those of her son.

Something of such thoughts were passing through Maude's busy brains that evening as she was seated by Lady Elizabeth, and listened to her conversation, which flowed easily and naturally enough in various channels, without turning too much upon her idolized son. But Maude had observed Sir Digby at a little distance hovering near, but yet courteously enough resting by the way to talk to Mr. Penrose, who had asked some question relative to a piece of rare sculpture, which he knew was one of the many gems of art collected in past generations by Sir Digby's forefathers.

John Penrose was not one of the *habitués* of the Abbey—in fact, he had been but very seldom there, and his present invitation was chiefly owing to the intimacy that Sir

Digby believed to exist between him and Louis Beaumont. Sir Digby was also quite liberal enough to allow that a man whom he found to be a perfect gentleman in every respect, might be admitted as such by persons in his own position, and in places where his ancestors had never been recognized, or known only as the Brewers of Castleford.

It was Maude who, in her own mind, made a comparison between the two men—the one of long descent, and the other, whose forefathers had never aspired to rise above the middle class, to which they naturally belonged.

Miss Beaumont was well aware that wealth and education are rapidly breaking down the bounds of separation between the two classes; and that in these latter days people stand more on their own individuality as to what they are themselves, and what

they have, than on the bygone claims of preceding generations. Still Maude Beaumont was a born aristocrat; she had lived and been nurtured in the purple, and it would have cost her many a pang to have sunk ever so little below that social standard in the merits of which she so firmly believed. .

The two men she was so closely observing, with a new and strange feeling of interest, stood, as has been said, talking earnestly together, and near enough for her quick ears to catch the greater part of their conversation. But, in the first place, her scrutinizing eye was bent on the outward appearance of each, as she contrasted the two. John Penrose, brewer though he was, bore the inspection well; there was not a look or tone, in its quiet self-possession, that savoured of the parvenu. The difference of a dozen years in the men's ages was but little appar-

ent—for Sir Digby looked younger, and Mr. Penrose older than he was.

They were both good-looking in their several degrees, and had each travelled and seen much of the world, also, in various ways. Perhaps the countenance of the man of higher rank was less intelligent than that of the man of business, but possibly it gained in refinement what might be wanting in quickness. Maude sat and speculated on the two—she even listened absently to an argument, or, more properly, a discussion carried on in respect to the piece of sculpture then engrossing the notice of the two gentlemen ; and Maude felt in her own mind that Mr. Penrose had the best of the argument. Then, somehow, and in some unbidden way, the thought arose that the man of business, with all his advantages, natural and acquired, only needed a wife of good birth and estab-

lished position to launch him safely into the calm waters of that social sea in which she floated so pleasantly herself, and enjoyed her existence, safe from those angry and conflicting currents which trouble and overwhelm those who embark all unsheltered on life's more stormy seas. There was, perhaps, that mysterious attraction in the girl's fixed attention, and the look bent alternately on the two men, which made them turn simultaneously ; and being each favoured with a smile from Miss Beaumont, it had the effect of cutting short their conversation, and bringing them both to the side of the lady, where, with little interruption, each kept his place till the party dispersed.

Mr. Beaumont, meanwhile, had been improving his acquaintance with Ruth Maxwell, though not forgetting the claims his

cousin had upon him, and which had hitherto been so fully and cheerfully acknowledged. Gwendoline was, therefore, made happy, and consoled for Louis's temporary (and, as she believed, unavoidable) desertion during dinner by his entire devotion all the evening. She hung on his arm, as they made the tour of the rooms together, and listened to the music as they sat in each shady corner in the long corridors. They were not, however, alone, for Mr. Beaumont had intimated to his cousin that it would be a kind and gracious act in her to show every attention to the girl who had so great a claim on her gratitude; and not only on hers, but on that of all her family; especially, he remarked, as Miss Maxwell appeared to be a stranger in the neighbourhood. Gwendoline's gentle heart responded naturally and warmly to this appeal, and from



one whom she already honoured and delighted to obey. Thus it happened that Ruth was invited to accompany the two cousins, and walked and talked with both, happy in so doing ; whilst Mr. Beaumont thought he could never weary of looking on that calm, noble brow, or watching the expression of those deep, truthful eyes.

## CHAPTER XV.

"**M**OTHER," asked Ruth, the next morning, as she and Mrs. Maxwell settled themselves to their usual after-breakfast employments—"Mother, do you happen to know or remember a family of the name of Beaumont, who live somewhere in this neighbourhood?"

It chanced that Ruth was sitting at a small table drawn close to the window, whilst Mrs. Maxwell, with her face turned from the light, was leaning back in her chair by the fire, with a book in her hand. There was perfect silence for a moment or two after Ruth's question, and she went on with her

work, illustrating some texts intended for her favourites amongst the poor with whom she had lately become acquainted. Then, observing Mrs. Maxwell's silence, Ruth went on—

“Ah! I forgot. You cannot know these young people. And Miss Powys told me they have been living at a great distance, in Wales, I think, for ever so many years—so you could not have known them.”

“I never heard of Miss Powys,” replied Mrs. Maxwell, in a low, faint voice; but Ruth was too busy with her own thoughts, and some little difficulty in her occupation, to notice the strange tone in which her step-mother spoke. So, after a moment's pause, Ruth resumed her subject, saying,

“I wish you did know them, mother!”

“What, this Miss Powys of whom you spoke just now, Ruth?”

"Yes, mother. Miss Powys, and Mr. and Miss Beaumont. They told me—at least, Mr. Beaumont did—that they live at a place called Harewood Park, only a few miles from here. I wonder we never heard of them before, that no one ever spoke of them, for both Mr. Penrose and my aunt appeared to know them quite well."

"And how came you to make the acquaintance, Ruth?" said Mrs. Maxwell, slowly recovering herself.

"Oh! I forgot to tell you, dear. Miss Powys was the young lady who was so near having a bad accident that day at the railway station. Do not you remember it now, mother?"

"Oh! yes. So that was Miss Powys. And the gentleman who thanked you when we were in the carriage?" asked Mrs. Maxwell, trying to steady her voice.

"He is Mr. Beaumont," answered Ruth; and, continuing—"You cannot think, mother, what a nice family they seem to be!" little dreaming of the storm of wild emotion her few words had stirred up in her listener's heart. That poor heart beat almost to suffocation, as she thought—"So that man who had spoken a few words of passing courtesy to her was her son!—her own and only one! Living so near, and yet so far, far from her!"

Mrs. Maxwell rose and tottered from the room. She had need to be alone—alone, for a time, where none but her God could see her, and perhaps speak some word of comfort and direction to her troubled soul.

Ruth went on calmly with her work, her thoughts meanwhile busy about her new acquaintances, towards whom she felt a mysterious attraction. Whilst she was thus

occupied Mr. Penrose was announced. He looked at her for a moment with curious eyes, as if to see whether any announcement had been made that could have startled or surprised her, since her return from the last night's entertainment; for he had not been slow to perceive that Louis Beaumont had paid more attention to Ruth Maxwell than it was his custom to accord to young ladies in general. He felt sure, also, that, at the time, both the young people were in ignorance of the tie which might have seemed to connect, but, if known, would only operate to keep them apart. After a few passing observations, John Penrose came to the conviction that Ruth Maxwell's calm serenity had not been disturbed, and that her reminiscences of the preceding evening were those of unalloyed pleasure.

"But where is Mrs. Maxwell?" John

asked, at last. "I expected to find *her*, but possibly not *you*, this morning, so early; for we were very late, and I know you are not used to such dissipated hours."

"No," replied Ruth, in her ordinary calm tone. "But I managed to wake at my usual time, and get down to make my mother's breakfast; besides, I had so much to tell her. I hoped she would have enjoyed a little of my amusement second-hand."

"I am afraid, then, you have been disappointed?" asked John Penrose.

"Well, partly so. My mother stole away in the midst of my little history, so I suppose she was not much interested in the recital." And then Ruth returned to her drawing, and seemed to have dropped the subject.

Mr. Penrose stood by her in the window,

playing with a paint-brush he had taken up, and thinking how unfair it was not to speak openly to the noble-hearted girl, and let her know how her new friends stood related to her step-mother ; and how, if she and they knew who her father was, the intimacy would no doubt come speedily to an end. Did Mr. Penrose wish that it might? No, he had no such selfish desire of monopolizing Ruth's society as that might imply ; only he hated all mystery and mystifications, and was of opinion that some harm was sure to arise in every case where such a line of conduct was persevered in.

Pursuing this train of thought, he felt an honest reluctance to talking to Ruth of the family at Harewood Park, as of ordinary strangers with whom she had just become acquainted. But it was not his province, he knew, to rush in with the family news that



her step-mother felt fit to withhold. And, whilst he was inclined to blame Mrs. Maxwell for her reserve, he little thought how painful it must be to a mother's heart to draw attention (even of the most sympathising) to the fact that, with or without reason, she is ignored and disowned by the children whom she has borne and cherished in their infancy.

Then he looked at Ruth, who, all unconscious of the scrutinizing gaze bent upon her, went on quietly with her employment, putting in her colours, and making her delicate touches, with as steady a hand as if she were sitting quite alone and unobserved. John Penrose then began to draw a comparison in his own mind between Ruth Maxwell and Maude Beaumont. He had often stood by the latter when she was engaged in drawing, and had watched the bold, mas-

terly way in which Maude managed her pencil, and had admired the light, careless tone in which she would at the same time engage in conversation with himself or any one present, never seeming too absorbed in her occupation to lose her interest in all that was passing around. Always brilliant, generally amusing, even when somewhat caustic in her remarks, Maude was indeed a woman of whom any man might be proud. With beauty so bright, and talents and accomplishments like hers, what destiny might she not aspire to? Nothing could be too high for her deserts, if she set her mind upon achieving it. But who, and what manner of man ought he to be that could seek to win and wed such a peerless creature?

From these rather lover-like reflections he descended next to a closer survey of Ruth.

Maxwell's appearance, and such perfections as might be placed to her account. He scanned the smooth, white, broad, rather low forehead, the pencilled, straight eyebrows, and general contour of that pale, intellectual countenance, and thought the delicate features, with their firm and rather grave expression, harmonized exactly with the style in which her light brown hair was braided back from her face and gathered up in a large thick coil behind, guiltless of all artificial devices, which, in its natural abundance, it needed not. Ruth's dress, too, was plain, but of handsome material, falling in full rich folds as she sat, or sweeping with a kind of dignified grace when she walked or stood still.

There was no brilliancy about Ruth Maxwell, either in herself or her surroundings. She never gave utterance to sparkling

nothings, such as fell from Maude's lips un-awares whenever she talked, and which, at the same time, often provoked and fascinated those hearers whom she favoured most. Perhaps if others less beautiful and less gifted had said the same words, they would have fallen flat, stale, and unprofitable in many cases on her hearers' ears; but with her nameless grace of tone and manner, John Penrose felt to his cost that a word or a look from Maude Beaumont was sufficient to overturn his most resolute determinations, and bring him to the most desperate state of folly and self-abnegation.

It was impossible for two women, both beautiful, and, to a certain extent, amiable and young, to be more dissimilar, and John Penrose found himself trying to solve the problem, of which of the two was most to be desired for a wife—not for himself, of

course—oh ! no, there was no question nor thought on his part of marrying—at least, not for long years to come ; and, in the meantime, no doubt both the young ladies would have disposed of themselves to some fortunate suitor. He liked speculating (or he erroneously supposed he did) on the future of two such girls, all apart from any interest of his own in the subject. He began to think that Ruth's husband would be a very lucky fellow. He had seen by this time enough to know that, if Ruth loved a person, she would be ready to lay down her life for him ; or, living, to devote her whole existence to his service, without a thought of self or self-interest in any way. And then what a fine, reliable nature was hers ! What a woman to turn to in time of trouble or perplexity !—and what a depth of quiet happiness a man might enjoy with

her in his day of prosperity. She would never perplex or startle you with any unreasonable or reckless ways, like some women—calm, and beautiful, and intelligent, she would instinctively choose the good, and refuse the evil. Happy indeed would the man be who might be fortunate to gain that heart! And John Penrose entertained a sort of intuitive perception that as yet it had passed on through life in “maiden meditation fancy free.”

“But if she once loved,” thought Mr. Penrose, gazing down upon the bent head and busy hand—“I think it would be devotedly and for ever.”

Perhaps the intensity of the thought and look penetrated like electricity through Ruth's brain, for she raised her head and her eyes quickly, to meet those of her almost-forgotten visitor fixed most intently

upon her. She smiled and coloured a little at her absence of mind, and said,

"I am afraid this is not very amusing work for you to overlook, Mr. Penrose; and I have been so engrossed by it that I had almost forgotten you were standing there all that time. I wanted to get this done to-day, so I know you will excuse my going on with it while you are here."

"I am very glad you do not put yourself out in any way for me. I can amuse myself well with my own thoughts. I rather fancied Mrs. Maxwell might have come in."

"I will go, and let her know," said Ruth, rising, without the least hurry or confusion; and, looking for the morning paper, she placed it before Mr. Penrose, and then left the room.

She did not make a very long absence, but soon came back, looking, however, far

more sad than when she went away. The change was so obvious that the visitor remarked,

“I fear Mrs. Maxwell is annoyed at my asking for her; and, after all, it was the merest trifle. She asked some question about that widow Brown's family, and I came to tell her what I knew, that was all. I am sorry to have disturbed her, for I could have given my information to you just as well.”

“Oh no,” said Ruth rather eagerly, “no, don't do that. It is such a good thing for her to be interested in anything; she will like to hear all about those poor people from you; so please tell me nothing, but answer my dear mother's questions to herself. You will not mind calling in, I daresay, some time to-morrow, when you may be passing this way?”

“You know I shall only be too glad to



call at any time, but I fear Mrs. Maxwell may be ill—is it sudden ? ”

“ My mother is ill, I fear,” answered Ruth sadly, “ but she is often so. Sometimes I fear something here may worry or annoy her—for it is more mind than body, I fear, that suffers. She was pretty well this morning at breakfast, and since then she seems to have quite broken down. She will be better again I daresay to-morrow ; but she looked very ill just now when I went to her, and said she was not equal to seeing any-one.”

“ You do not ascribe her—annoyance, or worry, or whatever it is, to any particular cause ? ” asked Mr. Penrose, with an appearance of such real interest as entirely to banish the idea of any inquisitiveness in the question.

“ No. I wish I did, because then I might

help her better either to bear it, or to avoid any exciting cause, if possible ;—but I really know so little about many things that it is useless to talk or speculate,” replied Ruth, with the tears she would not shed, or give way to, sparkling on her eye-lashes.

John Penrose was moved to a feeling towards Ruth he had never experienced before, and thought it would be very sweet to have the privilege of advising and comforting her ; but he only said :

“ I wish I could be of any use to Mrs. Maxwell—or you.”

“ Thank you very much, but I do not see that anyone can do anything to make my dear mother quite happy or well. I had so hoped the change here would have done her good, and urged her almost against her own wishes to make the trial ; and now it almost seems to me as if she drooped daily more and more.”

As Ruth said this, she sat down wearily and looked wistfully in John Penrose's face, as if seeking, in spite of her words, some aid or direction there.

"Suppose—suppose," said he, after a moment's consideration—"suppose you were to advise Mrs. Maxwell to go out a little—to enter by degrees into a little society in the neighbourhood."

This suggestion was caused by the idea that Mrs. Maxwell might thus be brought by degrees to her children's knowledge, and the recollection of her existence, so that they might at least have the opportunity of seeking her; and thus things might perhaps be brought about accidentally, without anyone taking upon himself the obnoxious task of forcing the subject upon either the disowned mother or long-estranged children. But to Ruth, who was all unconscious of the

state of affairs, the proposition appeared most unpalatable, and she answered hastily,

“ Oh no, indeed, Mr. Penrose ; you do not know my mother. I am quite sure I could never persuade her to ‘ go out ’ (as it is called) again. She gave that up long ago, and since she lost my dear father, I am quite sure she never would—never could enter into society again ! ”

“ But, my dear Miss Maxwell, people under the same circumstances do enter into society again, or else what would become of the world ? ”

“ Oh ! there are plenty of happy people to go into the world and enjoy it and its gaieties ; but to people like my mother, oh, Mr. Penrose, it would be simply impossible ! ”

“ Then it is your opinion that, after a great bereavement, the survivor should shut him-

self, or herself, up in total seclusion for the remainder of their days?—that is your opinion?”

“I have no opinion on the subject, Mr. Penrose, because circumstances vary so much in different people’s cases; some may be called upon and obliged to do many things, however repugnant, that others may not—the young, especially. However, I do think this—that a woman who, like my dear mother, and at her time of life, has lost all her children and a much-loved husband, can have no farther business in the world—I mean, of gaiety or general society. It seems to me that God himself has called her during her life here out of this world, by removing those she loved so dearly to another—and her heart must always be where her lost treasures are. I am sure those are my mother’s feelings, so judge

whether 'society' would have any charms for her?"

"No, certainly not, in her case. So now I will say good morning."

## CHAPTER XVI.

M<sup>R</sup>. PENROSE'S adieux were made rather hastily ; he did not like "serious conversation" to be obtruded upon him, and had a great horror (as all honest men have) of anything like "cant." Still he was candid enough to acquit Ruth of *that*, and give her credit for all good and genuine feeling in what she had said. Nevertheless, it must be confessed it jarred a little on his feelings ; he did not like a girl, whom he was inclined almost to admire, to take things so seriously. He had known and liked many gay and pleasant widows, young and old, in the course of his worldly

experience, and he thought it savoured of narrow-minded prejudice to condemn all such to quit the world, and live a life of comparative retirement. He forgot that Ruth only spoke as to the individual case before her; and Ruth, on her part, forgot—indeed she habitually did so—that her “mother,” as she fondly called her, was already a widow when she married her father. Still she was right in what she advanced, that, with all Mrs. Maxwell’s melancholy experiences and bereavements, there was little in the world to tempt her from the seclusion in which she preferred to pass her days.

“She sees everything *en noir*,” was his parting reflection, as he passed the threshold of Ruth Maxwell’s house, and rejoiced to find himself on the sunny side of the pavement as he walked quickly away. Then



again his thoughts stole back to Ruth, and he found himself excusing what he called her gloomy train of ideas, by recollecting how next to impossible it must be to be merry in the atmosphere in which Ruth lived—her whole existence devoted to the task of rendering the life of a melancholy recluse endurable. “And yet,” said conscience, “she is generally quite cheerful, and seems to find positive pleasure in her self-imposed duties.”

He had been asked to dine with the Beaumonts that day, so he could not pay a morning visit also, as he would have liked to have done, and therefore was obliged to beguile the intervening hours in such a way as seemed best to him—partly in matters of business (which he never neglected), and partly in a course of reading, for which he had not much inclination that day.

It was doomed to be a day of disappointment to the young man, for, on arriving at the Park, he found he was likely to be far removed from the seat of honour by the beautiful young hostess, at dinner. Maude always took the head of her brother's table, and the places on either side were filled by men far higher in the social scale than John Penrose, the brewer and banker at Castleford. It fell, too, to his lot to take in to that repast a *ci-devant* young lady, who was well known to, and not much esteemed by him. However, she talked much, and required but little attention, so her neighbour was at liberty to bestow his where he listed; and, as the person on the other side of him happened to be engrossed by the lady he had taken in to dinner, Mr. Penrose found himself with a good deal of spare time on his hands. But as he

absently listened and replied to the conversation so volubly directed to his outward ears, he had all the appearance of a man fulfilling his duty and pursuing his pleasure at his friend's hospitable table. Then did he occasionally steal glances towards the head of the table, and strive with all his powers to catch some stray sparkles from that lively chatter which was flowing on so smoothly; but the merriment had lost all its point before it reached his ears, and the ripples of that soft laugh, generally so musical, were sure to be drowned in the gruffer tones of the answering laughter it evoked in her two supporters. Then, when some graver discussion took the place of the lighter one, only a few tantalizing sentences from Maude reached the distant place where he sat—in fact, only a few disjointed words, from which he inferred what she might be saying; and

he longed to join in the debate, and see those bright glances bent on himself, that were now turned from time to time on "those two stupid fellows on each side of her," as Mr. Penrose mentally designated the gentlemen in that happy position.

Gwendoline Powys occupied her usual place at her guardian's left hand—the other being always filled by the lady he took in to dinner. The party was large that day, and, therefore, much broken up into *tête-à-têtes* between those whose lot it was to sit together.

There was a good deal of general talk amongst those who had no particular subject of interest peculiar to themselves—about the Fancy Fair of the preceding day; and during a lull in the tide of conversation, a solitary voice became suddenly audible, declaring to its next neighbour,

"Yes, there were some very pretty girls at the stalls, but there was a prettier one still not keeping any."

"Do you know who it was?" asked the lady, who was now bound to take up the burden of the discourse so unexpectedly made public property.

"I heard it was some Scotch girl," answered the gentleman, shortly, not caring to commit himself by mentioning names."

"Oh, you mean Miss Maxwell," replied another gentleman, innocent of all *mauvaise honte*, and only desirous of information, either public or private, as he asked, "Does any one know her?—she was immensely admired."

Mr. Beaumont stopped abruptly in what he was saying, and took the rolling ball of conversation into his own hands and made answer :

"I think Miss Maxwell is a stranger in this neighbourhood, but we all know her aunt, Lady Cunliffe, with whom she came, very well."

"Oh! Lady Cunliffe's niece. Ah, oh!" observed an elderly lady, in a low voice, to an old gentleman, who sat by her. "You remember, I daresay, something about the name—singular, isn't it?"

The old gentleman did not, however, seem to remember much, so Mrs. Harrowby proceeded to enlighten him by saying, in an almost inaudible tone,

"The same name as those young people's mother—hush! don't look at Miss Beaumont, she is so quick; she will be sure to hear."

"Well, what of her? She married some doctor, and died. We have never heard of her since."

"Ah, yes; it was only the name being the

same. I wondered how Mr. Beaumont would look when he said it. But it came out easily enough."

"Lor! what should he mind about it?—he was only a little lad then, and the girl but a baby—all forgotten by this time."

"Some things never *are* forgotten. Everybody blamed *her* so at the time, leaving those two poor little children. Lucky it was for them falling into such good hands as the Colonel's."

"Yes, and it seems the young man is bent on showing his gratitude by taking care of the young lady he has left, in his turn."

And so the old pair brushed up old recollections, and in their renewed mental activity foresaw things yet to come, and succeeded in amusing themselves very satisfactorily till the dinner came to an end.

The subject of Miss Maxwell was taken up also in other quarters, without any reminiscences being dwelt on, but simply as relating to the young lady herself. Mr. Beaumont observed to his cousin,

"I think, Gwen, it would only be civil if you were to call on Miss Maxwell—you and Maude; you owe her so much."

"Yes, and I like her so much, too," said Gwen earnestly. "I wanted Maude to go with me to-day to Lady Cunliffe's and call, but she said we need not be in such an immense hurry. In fact, I think we were both tired and idle to-day; but we can go to-morrow—and you, Louis, won't you come also? You seem to think her nice."

"Yes, she is a nice lady-like girl. I have no objection to join your party to-morrow," said Mr. Beaumont, with rather more indifference than the occasion called for.



After the gentlemen came into the drawing-room that evening, Mr. Penrose sought eagerly to indemnify himself for his long penance during the tedious dinner, and an answering glance from Maude brought him in a moment to her side.

"Oh," said she, as he settled himself in the vacant place,—“Oh, Mr. Penrose, I have been wanting to ask you half a dozen questions, I have not had the opportunity before; but now, do tell me something about this Miss Maxwell who has suddenly appeared amongst us in the twofold enviable character of a beauty and an heiress. Who is she?”

Mr. Penrose looked searchingly into Maude's face; he longed to say—“the step-daughter of your own mother.” But seeing nothing there except a somewhat cold curiosity, he answered,

"I thought you knew she was a niece of Lady Cunliffe's?"

"Yes, I know that, and no more, for I have not the most remote acquaintance with that lady's pedigree or maiden name, or any other name by which to identify this Miss Maxwell."

"I think I can inform you so far. Lady Cunliffe was a Miss Harrington, and so was Miss Maxwell's mother—both the daughters of a Colonel Harrington, and both married in India; and there also I understand Miss Maxwell's mother died when she was born."

"Thanks," exclaimed Maude laughing. "I have always said the amount of general and useful knowledge possessed by you is quite unique. I always come to you when I want enlightening on any particular subject. How do you contrive, Mr. Penrose, to pick up so much available information?"

"In this instance I had not far to seek. Miss Maxwell is in some degree placed—that is to say, her worldly possessions are placed under my care." John Penrose was not sorry to observe that a shade flitted over Maude's bright face, and her tone was less bantering when she spoke again.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Penrose; I did not know you were so deeply concerned in Miss Maxwell."

"In Miss Maxwell's fortune, you mean, Miss Beaumont."

"Well, the interest that the one inspires is likely to be extended to the other; but may I ask whether she is any relation of yours?"

"None whatever, and yet there is a species of connexion between us, seeing my uncle married her aunt; but I was a perfect stranger to her, personally, till very lately.

But it is owing to the connexion I have mentioned that it happens I am trustee to Miss Maxwell's property."

"I see," said Maude, with a slight frown ; and continuing, "It must bring you very much together?"

"Yes, I have seen a good deal of Miss Maxwell in consequence—that is, since she came to live at Castleford."

"Well, then, you are well qualified to answer my question. Is she a nice person?"

"Very, as far as I can judge," answered John Penrose, rather enjoying his position ; but he had hardly time to speculate on what point he might have to answer next, before he found himself again doomed to disappointment, for Maude turned abruptly round, and said to an elderly gentleman who was hovering near, and had sat by her at dinner,

"Oh! I have not forgotten my promise, Lord Norton; we will have our game of *bésique* now, if you please." Then, addressing Mr. Penrose, she said—"Might I trouble you, Mr. Penrose, to bring me the box?—you know just where it is;" and when the disappointed man returned from the errand on which she had sent him, he found his charming snug corner already appropriated by the gentleman with whom Miss Beaumont had elected to play at *bésique*. Nor was his annoyance in the least removed or lessened by Maude's receiving the box from his hands with a gracious smile of acknowledgment, accompanied by a "thanks very much," which sounded like a dismissal from any further share in her evening's amusement. He therefore revenged himself upon himself, for, after loitering amongst a group of men at the far

end of the room, he took an early leave, just walking up to say good night to the lady of the house, who returned it, saying absently,

“Oh! going so soon, Mr. Penrose? What a sensible person you are to eschew late hours and idle company! Good night.”

If John Penrose had been inclined to make any rejoinder, he lost the opportunity, for Maude was already absorbed in her game, and all her attention given to her partner; so he drove rapidly home, feeling considerably disgusted with his evening's entertainment, and every person and thing he had met and seen in its untoward course.

The next day found him calling at The Bower, and answering all inquiries there—for Lady Cunliffe was rather given to ask questions; she had no objection in her turn

to answering them. However, she generally found it rather up-hill work with Mr. Penrose, as he was far too cautious a man to answer any but such as he saw fit, and had a clever way of evading all others. In the present instance, it was far from his intention to vent his disappointment of the previous evening at Harewood Park in any complaints of his friends there. So as long as Lady Cunliffe confined her queries to the number of guests, and names of the same, and other small-talk, she was duly informed of all she sought to know; but when she tried to draw upon his more personal experiences and opinions, she was eminently unsuccessful. Thus, after many queries, she remarked—

“Of course Sir Digby was there—I need not ask that.”

The answer came readily enough.

"Oh, no! Don't you remember there is a large party staying at the Abbey?"

"True—how stupid of me to forget that! Miss Beaumont must have missed him."

The remark passed unheeded, and Mr. Penrose addressed himself to the companion. After a short pause, in which Lady Cunliffe appeared to be collecting her forces, she said,

"I wonder whether either Mr. or Miss Beaumont said anything about my niece, and alluded to having made her acquaintance the day before at the Abbey?"

To which Mr. Penrose made reply—

"I sat at a distance both from Mr. and Miss Beaumont, and the party was too large to admit of general conversation."

"Ah! yes, at dinner, I daresay; but you had plenty of time for talking after."

"I do not know what others may have



had, but we left the dining-room late, and I came away early."

"I 'wonder you did that," returned the lady; adding, in a musing tone of voice—"It was very strange, Mr. Beaumont and Ruth Maxwell's coming together in that way at the party the other day—very strange; and it struck me he seemed quite to take a fancy to her. Did it strike you too?"

"I did not particularly observe them."

"I daresay not. You young people have generally your own affairs to attend to; but we old ones, who stand by, often see most of what is going on. Now, would it not be odd if Mr. Beaumont fell in love with Ruth Maxwell?"

"You forget the cousin," remarked Miss Wheeler, who, still suffering from her cold, sat silently near, seemingly little interested in the conversation going on, but quietly

taking her note of all that was said, or left unsaid.

“ Ah ! yes, there is that Miss Powys, to be sure—and a very nice girl she is ! I like her the best of the two ladies at the Park. They say she is engaged to her cousin ; but is it true, Mr. Penrose ? ”

“ Indeed, Lady Cunliffe, they have never taken me into their confidence, and, like you, I only know what the world says.”

“ But you don’t believe it ? ”

“ I cannot say I either believe or disbelieve it.”

“ Well, I should like to know the truth of it, I confess, because——”

At that moment the servant threw open the door, and in a sonorous voice announced—

“ Mr. and Miss Beaumont, and Miss Powys ! ”

## CHAPTER XVII.

A VISIT from Mr. Beaumont was an event —especially at The Bower, where his card had generally done all that was expected from him in the calling way. So Lady Cunliffe did not fail to feel duly grateful on the occasion. Whilst Miss Wheeler made her own private comment thereon, Miss Beaumont took upon herself to explain—

“We are come, Lady Cunliffe, especially to call on your niece, Miss Maxwell, this morning. You heard, I daresay, all about our adventure at the railway station, when Gwen nearly had a dreadful accident, and

Miss Maxwell came so bravely to her rescue. We can never be sufficiently thankful to her, I am sure ; but it was only when we met at the Abbey that we knew her name. I hope we shall see her ?”

Then it fell to Lady Cunliffe's turn to explain that Miss Maxwell did not live with her, but in a house of her own, in the town of Castleford.

“ We can go and see her there, I suppose ?” said Miss Powys, rather appealing to her two companions, for it was seldom that Gwendoline originated any line of proceeding for the party.

There was a moment's silence following that remark ; both Lady Cunliffe and Mr. Penrose looked up, and cast an involuntary glance of appeal towards the other ; whilst Miss Wheeler, also stealing a look round the faces of the assembled party, sat still and

silent, enjoying the situation. Mr. Penrose returned Lady Cunliffe's glance with one which seemed to convey that the question rested with her—that he himself had no interest in it, and that it was not for him to interfere in family affairs. He therefore threw himself back in his chair, with a compressed look of determined silence about his mouth, and directed his eyes intently towards the ceiling. Lady Cunliffe, thus driven back on her own resources, observed,

“Well, now, it is very kind of you to intend calling on Ruth, and I only wish she was here to tell you so herself, and say what she would like about calling on her at her own house ; but the fact is, she leads a very quiet life, and sees very few visitors.”

“But my sister and Miss Powys hope,” said Mr. Beaumont, “to be allowed to rank themselves amongst the privileged few. So,

with your permission, we will leave our cards on Miss Maxwell as we ride home."

"Well, that will be best; and it is extremely kind, I am sure. But really she shuts herself up so that it is quite difficult to get her to come even here."

"That must be very bad for her," said Gwendoline, kindly; "and you ought not to let her, dear Lady Cunliffe; for I am sure she enjoyed going with you to the Fancy Fair, the other day."

"Of course she did, my dear Miss Powys—all young people naturally like going out; but poor Ruth has always had to think more of others than herself, and that is what she does now."

"I can quite fancy that of her. But in what way?" asked Gwendoline, with kindly interest.

"Oh! didn't you know Mrs. Maxwell is

quite an invalid, and never goes out? So that keeps Ruth so much at home," replied Lady Cunliffe, desperately plunging into the subject she had fully intended to avoid.

Her hearers were, however, as may be supposed, entirely unconscious that they had any personal interest in the subject, and contented themselves with murmuring a few civil and sympathetic sentences respecting the invalid lady. But Mande, who sat a little apart, and nearest to Miss Wheeler, and recollected every word John Penrose had said to her about Miss Maxwell the preceding evening, observed in a low voice to the companion,

"I did not know Miss Maxwell had a mother. I fancied, from something I had heard, that Lady Cunliffe's sister was dead."

"So she is—Mrs. Maxwell is the step-mother."

"Oh!" replied Maude, enlightened, but not suspecting anything, never having heard of Mr. Maxwell's first marriage; and so very little even of his second to her own mother, that the communication made little or no impression upon her, and she only observed,

"Oh! really, then, if the invalid lady is not Miss Maxwell's own mother, it is doubly good of her to devote herself so entirely; but the lady ought not to be selfish, and should let Miss Maxwell see something of society, and have the opportunity of making her own friends."

Miss Wheeler contented herself with smiling mysteriously, and observing,

"I daresay Miss Maxwell will make plenty of friends in due time."

Maude looked at the companion rather suspiciously, and then said,



"Then I can only hope she will permit us to be amongst the number."

And whilst Mr. Beaumont was beginning to talk of ordering their horses round (for they had all ridden over) the door again opened to admit a visitor—one who entered unannounced, and was no other than Ruth Maxwell herself. Nothing could be more opportune than that arrival. The aunt was unfeignedly glad that her niece was come to answer for herself; it took all the weight of responsibility from her own ease-loving shoulders; and the whole party brightened up under the sunny influence of Ruth's cheerful, pleasant countenance. She was, in truth, very happy in meeting these young acquaintances of hers. It was such a new event in her life to have time and opportunity to enjoy herself in that way. She was charmed with her friends,

and they seemed equally attracted by her.

In a little time they were all chatting merrily together ; but, by degrees, Mr. Beaumont, his cousin, and Ruth formed a little coterie by themselves ; whilst John Penrose stole by degrees nearer to the place where Maude and the companion were still sitting, and managed, after a time, to engross the whole of Miss Beaumont's conversation ; whilst the other lady relapsed into her usual state of silence. As for the lady of the house, she was contented to fall back on her cushions, and amuse herself by watching the two groups.

"This is really very pleasant," said she, at last rousing up, and thinking it incumbent on her to take some part in her friends' amusement. "I only wish you would all stay and dine here—do, Mr. Beaumont—you know you can trust Le Maître not to

poison you, even though this would be a sort of little *impromptu* dinner-party."

"We are all aware of Le Maître's superlative talents, Lady Cunliffe, and, as far as I am concerned, should like nothing better than to accept your hospitality; but there is always some spoke in the way of pleasant doings. We cannot stay, as I expect a friend or two to dine with us."

"Well, then, promise for some other time," said the genial lady.

Mr. Beaumont cast a hasty glance towards Ruth, as if her presence would be the all-important item of enjoyment in the proposed entertainment, which Lady Cunliffe quickly perceived, and as quickly called to Ruth,

"My dear, I expect you to dine here on—what day is it to be, Miss Beaumont?—Tuesday—well, Tuesday next; and you, too, Mr. Penrose, you will come, won't

you? You know I can't manage either to go to or to give great formal dinner-parties, so I shall hope to see you all in a friendly, quiet way on Tuesday, at seven. I can't dine later, so please excuse it if it is too early."

"We shall be only too happy," said Louis Beaumont; whilst his sister and cousin smilingly echoed his words in a sort of half audible murmur, which answered all the purpose, and satisfied their lady hostess. Then there were horses to be ordered round, and good-byes to be said, and sundry little nothings to be uttered at last. Mr. Beaumont's last little speech was—

"Then we will not leave cards to-day, as we intended, Miss Maxwell—you will give us leave to call instead?"

"Oh! I shall be so glad to see you all; but I fear my mother may not be able," re-

plied Ruth, with that frank simplicity which was part of her nature.

"Don't you think Mrs. Maxwell might admit us some day when she is tolerably well?" asked Gwendoline, with kindly anxiety to include the invalid in some of the pleasures of their new acquaintanceship, little thinking, poor girl, in what direction it might tend.

Ruth looked on the sweet face, and almost longed to kiss it, as she answered,

"There is nothing I should like so much as that you might see my dear mother, and that she might have the pleasure of making your and Miss Beaumont's acquaintance, and I do hope that some day before long she will be equal to it."

"Oh! yes; and you must persuade her to drive over to Harewood," said Maude. "The change will do her good, and she

shall not be bored at all in any way when she comes."

"What is that you were saying just as we came away?" asked Mr. Beaumont of his sister, as they rode slowly out of the gates which enclosed the approach to The Bower.

"Only asking that nice girl to drive over with her invalid mother some day soon. It would be nice for her, I daresay, and Miss Maxwell looked pleased at the proposition."

"Ah!" said Louis, pondering, "*Miss Maxwell* is, as you say, very nice, but what do we know about *Mrs.*? Don't go entailing a bore on yourselves, that you may find it difficult to get rid of hereafter."

Maude only laughed and observed,

"I have an infallible receipt for getting rid of bores. I am not afraid."

But Gwendoline said,

"I am quite sure there is no danger of finding Mrs. Maxwell a bore. How could such a girl be the daughter of anyone but a nice person?"

"Oh! that does not follow at all," said Maude as they rode on more quickly; "and besides, in this case Miss Maxwell's own mother is dead, and this lady, whatever she may be, is only the step-mother."

Maude's words were dispersed in empty air, for her brother was trotting his horse a little in advance of the two girls, and Gwen heard little or nothing; but it would have been all the same—she was bent on showing every kindness to the girl to whom she owed so much.

Meanwhile, Ruth hastened home to her step-mother, her heart full of a new and undefined feeling of happiness; an interest in every living thing about her—a sudden

springing up, as it were, of a fountain of joy that made life and all in it beautiful.

"How well you are looking this morning, Ruth!" said Mrs. Maxwell, almost amazed at the fresh beauty she discerned in her countenance. "You must have had a pleasant walk to and from The Bower."

"Very pleasant, mother dear," said Ruth, coming quietly up to her mother's sofa, and sitting down on a low stool beside it, with her work in her hand; and then, after a moment's pause, saying, "But it was not all the walk. I had such a nice visit there—they were all so kind to me!"

"Your aunt is always kind; but I do not particularly like the lady who lives with her, Miss Wheeler."

"I was not thinking of either just then, mother," said Ruth, lifting her soft eyes to her step-mother's face. Then suddenly dropping



them, as she said quickly, "It was that Miss Powys—you know whom I mean, mother?—and her cousins; they were there, and so kind and pleasant."

"What, the Beaumonts?" returned Mrs. Maxwell, faintly, and growing even paler than before. "Are they so kind to *you*, Ruth?"

"Oh! mother, kindness is no word for all they are to me! They really seem to think that little service I was happy enough to render to Miss Powys, entitles me to their constant consideration and gratitude. And you too, mother dear, they want us both to drive over to Harewood Park—would not you like it, mother? I hear it is such a lovely place—I am sure you would enjoy it."

But the hand Ruth placed so tenderly on her step-mother's was almost rudely shaken.

off, whilst her face was turned suddenly from the side on which it had reposed, that Ruth might not see the storm of bitter feeling that well-meant little speech had roused in her breast. It was very sad altogether, for Mrs. Maxwell was conscious of a sudden rush of angry, jealous feeling against poor Ruth, whilst she thought of *her* as being welcomed and cherished by her own children, and she herself cast out, or be admitted to view her own lost home only through the kindness and courtesy lavished on her step-daughter !

Little did Ruth, in her patient devotion, think of the existence of such feelings in her "mother's" heart. She attributed all and every inequality of temper or conduct towards herself to some bodily ailment, or to the bitter recollection of some long-past mental suffering in which she had no part.

Ruth was never much inclined to think of herself, or to weigh her own merits, with the expectation of finding them duly recognized and acknowledged, so it happily saved her from much annoyance and discontent when they were (as was often the case) entirely passed over.

Therefore, when Mrs. Maxwell caught her hand away from Ruth's, she merely resumed her work, and waited calmly till her step-mother was better. At last there came a low, smothered voice between a sob and a sigh, which said—

“What of the Beaumonts, Ruth? Tell me all that over again—I am better able to attend now.”

So Ruth went gladly over the little history of her meeting that day, and then said,

“My aunt wishes me to dine there on Tuesday, to meet them.”

"Well, I suppose you are going, Ruth?"

Then, as she hesitated, Mrs. Maxwell exclaimed, impatiently—

"Surely, you are your own mistress, Ruth—pray consult your own wishes only. As far as I am concerned, I am only too thankful that you have the opportunity of amusing yourself—it relieves me of some of the misery I feel in knowing how much you give up for my sake."

Ruth did not disclaim. She saw that, for some cause or other, her step-mother was all unhinged and unlike herself, so she only knelt down by her, and laid her fresh fair cheek gently on the pillow beside the poor faded one, and whispered,

"It is so nice to be with you, mother dear, and we are so happy together; we will see about going to The Bower when Tuesday evening comes. I do not think I shall care to go then."

"But I shall care!" exclaimed Mrs. Maxwell, with sudden energy, "yes, and *they* will care! and they shall not be disappointed—or you either, my poor, dear, good child. What am I come to, if I am to stand in the way of everyone's enjoyment—I who have already outlived all human interest and possibility of pleasure myself—I who am truly a merewait and stray on life's stream, and shall be only too thankful to end the strife and sink in it for ever! Oh! child, do not mind me, or I shall go away from you for ever, and be at rest."

But Ruth was not to be repulsed. She quietly soothed the sorrowful woman. She said but little, and that was all in a cheerful spirit; she adverted lovingly but lightly to all her mother had been called upon to endure, implying, more than saying, in how resigned a spirit she had borne her sad lot in life, then whispered,

“ Oh, mother dear, it is ever so ; the most loved are the most chastened here. But it will be all right and bright at last, and when we meet *them* all again ! Oh, mother dear, think of that happy time.”

“ Ah ! Ruth,” sighed her step-mother, now all her gentle self again, “ you do not know, you cannot tell how much easier it is to bear a buried sorrow than a living grief.”

But she would not tell Ruth where the anguish lay.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



